COMMUNICATION HISTORY AND ITS RESEARCH SUBJECT[1]

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Abstract: The article proposes a way of defining the research subject of the history of communication. It concentrates on the use of philosophical tools in the study of the collective views of communication practices. The study distinguishes three aspects in the research subject: the means and forms of communication, the collective views of communication practices and communication practices as such. On the theoretical level, these aspects are reflected in various studies undertaken in the fields of media history, the history of the idea of communication and the history of communication practices. The analysis is conducted from a meta-theoretical point of view which places the argument within two orders: that of the research subject and that of the discipline. To give an outline of the current state of research, a distinction is introduced between an implicit and an explicit history of communication. The effect of these considerations is presented in a diagram that specifies the aspects of the research subject as well as the relationships between them.
Keywords: communicology, communication practices, reflexive historicizing, communication theory, media.

1. Introduction

Scientific research on communication has been undertaken since the first half of the 20th century. Naturally, communication itself, as well as reflection on it, has a much longer history. However, in the pre-scientific studies on what we now call communication, neither the term itself, nor even the notion of *communication* appears most of the time.[3]

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[2] Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland.
[3]The concept of communication is relatively recent, and the roots of the modern understanding of this concept should be sought in the 18th and 19th centuries, in the works

The main purpose of this article is to show which phenomena, objects, views, ideas or practices can be analysed as part of the interdisciplinary studies we call *communication history*. The categories listed above are regarded as the research subject of communication history. The research problem examined in this article is how to combine the various aspects of the research subject of communication history into a model that makes it possible to describe the relationships between them.

Communication history studies issues related to communication, be it interpersonal, group, organisational, or institutional: this means that all the different levels[1], means and forms of communication are taken into account. The definition of communication I have used here arises from constitutive (otherwise ritual or interactive) interpretations.[2] Such approaches allow for additional categorizations, created on the basis of various metatheoretical premises (ontological, epistemological, praxeological, axiological). The approach I adopted can be classified as an interpretative theory which may be contrasted – in terms of constitutive approaches – with normative theories (e.g., Juergen Habermas' theory of communicative action). I do not study what communication should be, nor how we should communicate. The understanding of communication which I adopt, which allows me to discuss the research subject of *communication history*, assumes that what communication is, how historical communities communicate and what they used to communicate, is primarily the result of the state of a given culture. In contrast to transmission models which focus on the analysis of synchronous elements (channel, sender, transmitter etc.), I focus on the cultural instrumentation of communicators.

Therefore, I shall assume that communication is a form of action that can be understood within the context of a given culture.[3] As such, it is

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of scholars such as John Locke, John Stuart Mill, Charles Horton Cooley or Edward Burnett Tylor (Simonson, Peck, Craig, & Jackson 2013: 16–20).

[1] Dennis McQuail's classification of communication levels can be regarded as a classic description (McQuail: 17–19).

[2] These interpretations emphasise the fact that communication is not just a simple transmission of information, emotions, concepts, but is composed of many different aspects of interaction. Among the works that present this type of approach, I can single out: *Communication as Culture* (Carey 2009), "Communication Theory as a Field" (Craig 1999), *Communication, Action, and Meaning. The Creation of Social Realities* (Pearce & Cronen 1980).

[3] I have accepted Wade Goodenough's definition of culture, who defined it as everything an individual needs to know, or believe in, in order to act within society in such a way as to be accepted. Goodenough writes: "Culture, in this sense, did not consist of patterns of recurring events in a community, though in practice it was often taken to be such and was argued by

intentional, rational and requires interpretation. Where at least two individuals participate in it, they use the appropriate signs. The primary function of communication is to enable individuals to function within a culture.

The set of these actions on the social level is called communication practice, thanks to which a given culture can be (re)produced. Every communication is realized on an individual and social level. The individual level is the specific action, whereas the social level (i.e., the various communication practices) realizes and maintains the social needs from which communication at the individual level arises.[1]

This connotes that communication, or more precisely communicative action, obtains its cultural meaning by being an element of a broader communication practice (which is why communication history mostly studies communication practices, instead of individual actions). As James Carey writes: "communication is a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed"(Carey 2009: 19). Such an action accomplishes various goals, usually reduced to the transmission of information, ideas, emotions or the creation of social bonds, understanding or symbolic interaction. This general definition of this basic term is necessary in order to define the largest possible group of these phenomena, things, ideas and practices which we shall consider as communicative (naturally, as part of further analysis, their characteristics shall have to be better defined). This will be presented *in the order of the research subject*, where I will indicate and describe three aspects of this subject. Furthermore, I shall also outline the *order of the discipline*, within which I distinguish three levels: the research subject (i.e. the whole *order of the research subject*), the theory and the metatheory.[2]

Therefore, if we consider culture, as well as practices and views, as subject to historical change, then we should also accept that communication

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cultural materialists to be only such (...) Rather, as something learned, culture was like a language, which is not what its speakers say but what they need to know to communicate acceptably with one another, including constructing utterances never made before yet immediately intelligible to others" (Goodenough 2003: 6).

[1] The distinction can be illustrated by the following example: when a child asks their mother for a toy in the shop, the child not only realizes their goal (communicates – through acting – that it wants the toy), but also maintains the functioning of language in our culture (at the social level the practice of communication maintains the possibility of "practicing communication". What is particularly important is that, the performer, i.e., the child, does not have to be aware of that.

[2] The relations between these orders and their elements will be outlined further in Figure 2.

should likewise be studied as a historical process.[1] This "historicization of communication" is shown as one of the modern approaches in contemporary studies of communication history. We should therefore remember that "communicating about communication" is also subject to historical evolution.

When examining diachronically the social changes that result from changes in communication practices, one needs to assume that practices are culturally grounded. That is why in the present paper I assume a constitutive account of communication process, i.e., an account that is not founded on an assumption about the universal (historically unchangeable) essence of communication. Such a fixed component in the alternative transmission approach is, for example, the assumption about the transferring (coding and decoding) of the thoughts between two individuals (e.g. in Claude Shannon's mathematical theory of communication, or Michael Reddy's research within cognitive linguistics). Therefore, the transmission model is not useful for sketching a mind map in the history of communication, that is, to achieve the purpose of this article. It limits the range of phenomena which can be called communication to those that can be expressed in transfer or transmission metaphors. The constitutive (ritual) views allow not only to take historical cultural change into account, but also to analyse the transmission models (rituals "require" transmission, but transmission does not always require rituals).

The argument in this article is divided into six sections. This section is the introduction, defining what communication history deals with. In the second section, I will show the current state of research on communication history and introduce some basic distinctions. In the third section, I shall analyse what I have termed the research subject of communication history. Using these findings and employing the distinctions made, I shall then present the research perspective adopted in this article in section four. Thanks to this perspective, in section five I shall describe three aspects of the research subject presented in section three and outline the relationships between them. In the final section, I shall take into consideration the findings of the previous sections and show how they can be used for further analyses.

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[1] This assumption is hardly evident in the context of communication studies, however a growing number of scholars consider it necessary: "As an interpretative human science, communication studies, we believe, is an inherently historicist discipline – meaning that communication scholars use ideas and interpret practices that trail histories and manifest themselves in particular ways at particular times"(Simonson et al. 2013: 3).

2. The current state of research – writing communication history

Communication history is an interdisciplinary study conducted using various research approaches. *Communication history* can be said to be a sub-discipline of *communicology* (or *communication as a discipline*).[1] Research on various aspects of communication history thus defined can be conducted within various scientific disciplines. The first to spring to mind is, naturally, history, where communication practices, for instance, might be considered a potential subject. In this article, however, I am mostly interested in research relating to practices, ideas, views and so forth, conducted as part of communication studies, and more precisely within its sub-discipline, namely communication history.

Naturally, this type of approach (history written not by historians but by communicologists or *communication researchers*) may give rise to many problems, tensions and imprecisions. However, a discussion between the disciplines – *communication* and *history* – can be fruitful for both parties. For it turns out that many problems are common to both, and new perspectives lead to new solutions (Zelizer 2008).

Every description of the state of research in the humanities and social sciences has to confront the problem of adapting certain positions to its theoretical framework, while rejecting others. This has to do with the above-mentioned historical evolution of the research tools themselves. In other words: in order to outline the state of research on communication history, we must decide if we are also to take into account those studies in which the modern concept of communication (or sometimes even the term itself) does not appear.

2.1. Implicit and explicit communication history

In this article, I assume that in reconstructing the state of research into communication history, it is possible to differentiate two periods: (1) an explicit communication history and (2) an implicit one, which could be called the prehistory of communication history.

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[1] Many articles have been written on the autonomisation of communication studies. There have also been many discussions about the name by which to designate this research discipline, or whether it is a discipline or a field. In this article, my assumption is that *communication history* is a sub-discipline of *communicology*, which is understood as an autonomous research discipline with its own methods and theories of communication. Naturally, this is only a matter of convention (Craig 1989; Lanigan 1994; Nordenstreng 2007).

The former has existed since the end of the 19th century, when the modern understanding of communication appeared,[1] and reached its apex in the middle of the 20th century with the formulation of the first theories of communication (e.g. Claude Shannon's mathematical theory of communication or the theories developed by the Chicago School).

Implicit history communication is the study of the historical development of what contemporary scholars call communication. In other words: within the framework of the history of communication understood in this sense, medieval scholars wrote about the development of rhetorical practice in ancient Greece. Aristotle's considerations on rhetoric should also be included here. This is a chronological caesura which does not bear on the research subject. Both implicit and explicit history study practices, means, forms and views. However, similarly to how the research of the Palo-Alto School is based on the modern understanding of communication ("explicitness of research"), Augustine of Hippo's considerations on the notion of signs and man's communion with God do not contain a "communication element" ("implicitness of research" – the practices in question were not termed "communication" in the modern sense of the term). It is only visible to us within the framework of the emerging history of communication, in which the semiotic analyses of a medieval theologian can help us understand modern analyses of communication practices.[2]

Within the period I have called *explicit communication history*, we can show two dominant theoretical approaches concerned with the study of: (1) media history, (2) communication theory.[3]

The first approach is the most common in communication history, which is why many scholars identify – on the level of terminology – *media history* with *communication history*. That is why we need to stress that the histories written within *media history* and the methodological considerations

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[1] I mean the definition of the process of *communication* as a process that is fundamental both to the functioning of societies and cultures, as well as to their understanding. The contemporary understanding of communication, as understood in this article, can be reduced to two interpretations: a *transmission view of communication* (communication as the transmission of ideas, thoughts, feelings etc. involving a sender and a receiver) and a *ritual (constitutive) view of communication* (communication as a type of symbolic interaction, involving subjects defined as participants of communication).

[2] Analyses of this type, in tracing the history of the idea of communication, are conducted, for instance, by John Durham Peters in his book (2001).

[3] Communication theory is a specific type of self-referential communication practice – a scientific communication about communication. Communication theory is founded upon theoretical collective views of communication, or more precisely, on communicological views (this point will be treated in more detail below).

on how to conduct such research can be taken as alternative to the analyses done within *communication history.* This is understandable if we take into account that media history (ultimately incorporated into the broader spectrum of communication history) grows out of *the history of the medium.* We can therefore say that prior to the emergence of the written history of communication practices, we had the history of the means by which communication practices were realised.[1] In other words: the history of the British press, for instance, was written first (and can properly be called a national micro-history of communication) – and this is the history of a (single) medium; while histories of media (describing not only the development of a particular medium but also of other elements of culture) did not appear until the beginning of the 20th century. I am mainly referring to what is known as the "first cultural turn" in English literary studies (Simonson et al. 2013: 23–24) and technological determinism (the works of Harold Innis, Jack Goody and Marshall McLuhan). This transition from the history of the medium to the history of media was extremely significant, since, as Siân Nicholas notes, different histories of the medium ask different questions (Nicholas 2012: 379–394). And it should be borne in mind that the press reader can also be a television viewer, and this fact cannot be ignored.

The second approach in explicit communication history is relatively young, though certain dominant perspectives can already be indicated (Löblich & Scheu 2011: 1–22), including the institutional (the history of communication theory from the point of view of research institutes and schools), the biographical (the impact of individual scholars on the development of communication theory) and the national (research on communication within a single research community, e.g. German communicologists).

The joining of these two periods was effected in communicology in the 1970s. A "communicative" reading of Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* led

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[1] In this article, I draw a distinction between *means, forms* and *media. Means of communication* are tools we use to communicate (the means is a *medium*). This can be the vocal tract, the telephone, the radio, a journal etc. These means are used in communication as part of a certain *form*: oral, written, audiovisual, graphic etc. Therefore, on the practical level (that of the subject of research) we have means and forms. However, when we create a history of communication, accentuating the means and forms, we write *media history* (or more precisely the "history of the medium, media and forms", though this is an awkward expression). The distinction between *means* and *forms* enables me further in the paper to show on the theoretical level the existence of the major perspectives within *media history*: the first one is a *micro-history of means* (description and development of a specific *medium*) and the other is, a *macro-history of forms* (examining the social changes that result from the transformation of the prevailing form of communication).

to an increased interest in rhetoric and semiotics (Craig 1989: 98–101). It is true, of course, that rhetorical practices have been studied since antiquity. My point, however, is that the rhetorical tradition was adapted by scholars of communication (greater emphasis began thereby to be placed on the historical aspect of communication, as exemplified by communication practices).

This means that the emergence of contemporary communication history unfolded along two paths: on the one hand, starting with the history of the medium, and proceeding through media history and the history of communication theory, and on the other, through the incorporation of a centuries-old tradition of rhetoric and semiotics.

In this article, I suggest that various types of research of communication practices be gathered under the common name of communication history. Introducing the distinction between an implicit and explicit history of communication makes it possible to consider the various research traditions as belonging to one research area. Such a synthesis at the metatheoretical level is based on the assumption about the possibility of historical research of the development of communication practices. A close approach to the tradition of communication research is to be found in Robert T. Craig, who also assumes a constitutive approach to communication (Craig 1999: 119–161). In the text entitled *Communication Theory as a Field*, he showed the correlations between the seven major traditions (rhetorical, semiotic, phenomenological, cybernetic, socio-psychological, socio-cultural, critical). The American scholar, however, did not emphasize the research of the historical development of the concept of communication. This aspect is crucial to any research on the history of communication. Another problem lies in the fact that Craig does not provide any justification as to the premises that make it possible to unify the various research traditions. This is an important issue, since various theoreticians use the same word (communication) with different meanings. What is of particular importance is that the scholar stresses the usefulness of applying philosophical apparatus (e.g. John Dewey and Hans-Georg Gadamer) to analyses of the traditions of research on communication.

2.2. Literature review

In spite of the sub-discipline's young age, the literature on communication history is impressive, though mostly devoted to the history of media and the history of communication theory. It needs to be stressed that when I say relevant literature, I am thinking of works that analyse the achievements and

publications of *communication historians* on a metatheoretical level. That is, they ask descriptive and normative questions: "How is communication history written and how should it be written?". For the three-aspect model developed in this article, two books, whose authors approach the issues within communication history from a meta-theoretical perspective, are of key importance.

An important work edited by four researchers from the University of Colorado at Boulder, entitled *The Handbook of Communication History*, appeared at the beginning of 2013. It is the first comprehensive monograph in which various researchers and historians of communication attempt to show what communication history is and what it deals with. It is worth noting that this book was published within the prestigious "ICA Handbook" series by the largest scientific association of communication researchers – the International Communication Association. It is a work that sets new standards and canons for thinking about and discussing communication history. The authors diagnose current tendencies and indicate six current trends which they label:

> *materiality* (including both traditional concerns of political economy and newer interests in relevance of bodies, material artifacts, and places), *depth* (of historiographic research and interpretation), *internationalization*, *social identities* (of gender, sexuality, race, class), *digitalization* (expanding archives and new forms of historiographic representation), and *reflexive historicizing*. (...) "Reflexive historicizing" refers to the need for scholars in all areas of communication research to acknowledge the historicity of their subject matters and to know something of the history if only as a context for understanding present phenomena (Simonson et al. 2013: 7).

The proposal put forward in this article belongs to the sixth trend, that is, *reflexive historicizing*, since it not only attempts to bring to light the historicity of the subject of research, but also shows how this historicity can be self-referential within reflection on communication. We should, however, note that the aforementioned authors fail to distinguish the material order (material artifacts, places etc.) and the disciplinary one (political economy, historiographic representation, reflexive historicizing), which I – on the meta-theoretical level – attempt to differentiate.

Barbie Zelizer edited an extremely interesting work *Explorations in Communication and History* (2008). The first part of the book is devoted in its entirety to the relationship between history and communication research. Josh Lauer's introduction (2008) deserves particular attention, as he demonstrates why the problem of historical research is a communication problem. In the same work, John Durham Peters (2008) analyses this problem similarly).

We can highlight not only numerous articles[1] devoted to communication history, but also prestigious periodicals such as *Media History* or *Communication Theory*, which frequently approach this same problem on their pages. An extensive list of the relevant literature can be found on the website of the "Project on the History of Communication Research".[2] And what is particularly useful for research – the literature is sorted by category, which makes it easier to search the archive.

3. The research subject of communication history

In this article, I propose a model of "Three aspects of the research subject of communication history", which shows how the research subject of communication and historical studies can be defined and described. The aspects[3] I present are:

1. means and forms of communication practices,
2. collective views of communication practices,
3. communication practices,

These aspects belong to the research subject, i.e. communication, which means that they can only be differentiated in the course of theoretical considerations. On the practical level, they are inextricable, meaning that communication constitutes a whole. The most problematic aspect is "communication practices", which in this grouping appears as something different than means and forms (through which practices are realised) and views (which shape the nature of practices). And yet practices are precisely what constitutes the core of historical and communication studies; their

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[1] Some of the most important texts in this regard are: "Researching Media History: National and Global Perspectives" (Cryle 1999), "From Media History to Communication History: Three Comparative Perspectives on the Study of Culture" (Jensen 2002), "The Future of Communication History" (Nerone 2006).
[2] See: "Project on the History of Communication Research", <http://historyofcommunicationresearch.org/>. Access date: May 1, 2013.
[3] There is no fixed order in which these aspects should be listed. Each is of equal importance for historical research on communication.

differentiation serves only to order the argument on the meta-theoretical level.

Communication practices are realised using means and forms. They are also influenced by collective views. These views are expressed (and so made available to scholars for interpretation) through communication practices. The means and forms of communication practice influence the views, and thereby also the practices themselves. This is precisely what is meant by the self-referentiality of communication, which is not only realised in practices (through forms and means), but also "speaks about itself" in these practices.
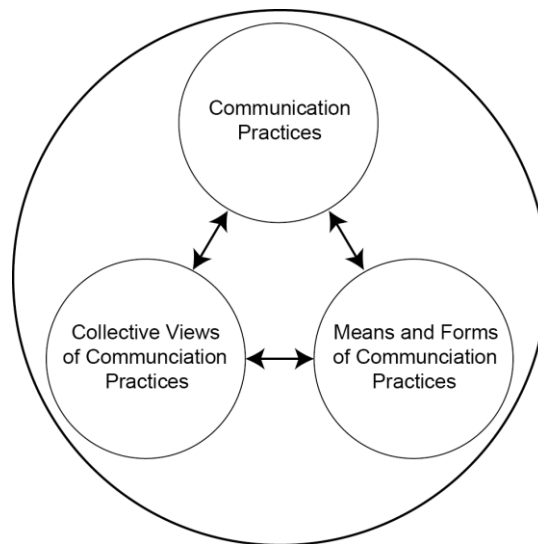
Fig. 1. Research Subject of Communication History. Diagram representing *communication* as a research subject, three of its aspects and the dependencies between them.

These aspects of communication are all mutually-related, however, they are not always taken into account in the same manner by researchers (e.g. researchers studying new media rarely invoke philosophical considerations regarding the concept of communication). Naturally, a

special emphasis is placed on one of these aspects when conducting research. If it falls on forms and means of communication practices, then we are writing (1) *media history*. If it falls on the study of communication seen through the collective views of communication practices, then we are writing (2) *the history of the idea of communication.* Placing emphasis on and studying communication from the viewpoint of communication practices will be called here (3) *the history of communication practices*. I refer to the combination of these three histories as *communication history*. That is why this article attempts to show the correlations between these separate aspects.

My goal is to demonstrate that the study of the evolution of the collective views regarding communication practices should form a part of an interdisciplinary approach called *communication history*. To this end, we can use the tools developed by the philosophy of culture (e.g. Ernst Cassirer's works on the philosophy of symbolic forms), the theory and philosophy of communication (e.g. James Carey's and John Durham Peters' reflections on the concept of communication, Richard L. Lanigan's communicology) and the social history of media (e.g. Peter Burke's work on the cultural history of media).

4. Research perspective

In section 5 of this article, I indicate what the subject of research can be. For this reason, the indicated practices, phenomena, ideas and things are described from a bird's eye view. This means that I adopt a meta-theoretical perspective, which allows me to show the historical transformations of the research subject and indicate how to perceive and define the writing of this type of communication history.

In other words, on the level of the *research subject* of communication history we have, for instance, the historical account of the publishing of the press in 18th-century France.

On the *theoretical level* we have a history of the publishing of the press in the 18th century, i.e., simply a given "history of communication" (such a study of printing, the press and books was undertaken e.g. by Robert Darnton, or Elisabeth Eisenstein). How we write such a history depends on the aspect we emphasise. Looking at the publishing of the press from the perspective of means and forms, we will write about printing presses, the development of fonts and paper, etc. Placing the emphasis on communication practices, we will pay more attention to the work of journalists, typesetters, publishers, readers etc. We will address not only specific actions, but also their social context – and so communication

practices. When proceeding from the collective views, we will, for instance, attempt to define the 18th-century views of what communication is and how it is realised within social life.[1]

On the *meta-theoretical level*, however, we have an analysis of the methods and assumptions (epistemological, ontological, axiological etc.) that: (1) condition the writing of a given communication history on the *theoretical level* and (2) determine what we decide to term communication on the level of the *research subject*. The way in which these levels and orders (of both discipline and subject matter) mesh, is shown in Figure 2.
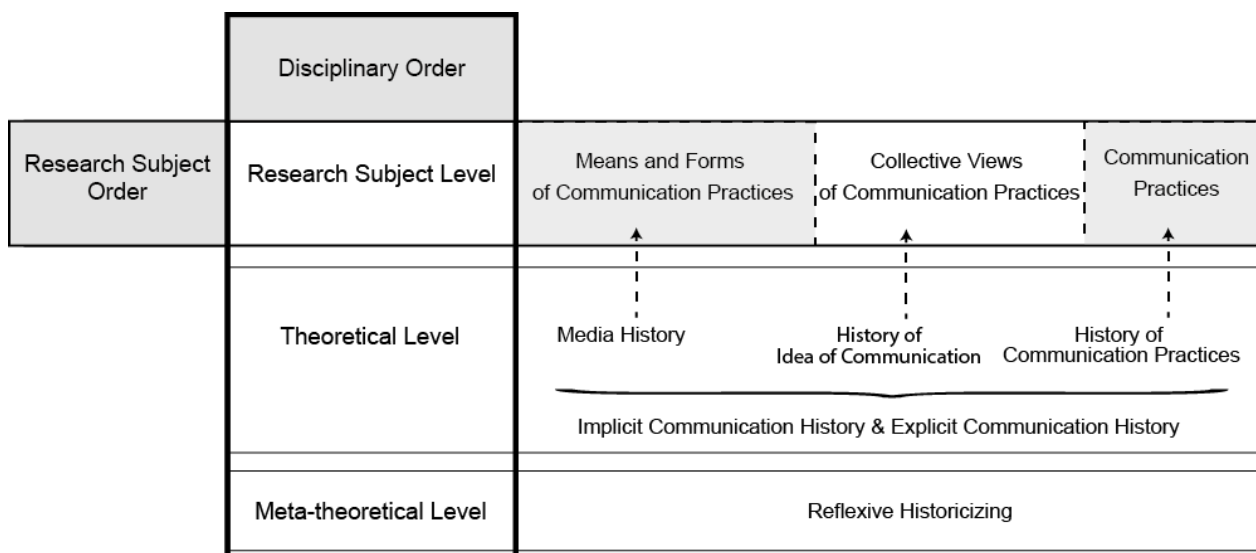
Fig. 2. Dependency map for the specific orders
and levels.

It is precisely within the framework of this research approach that we can indicate the place of philosophy as a useful tool for reflecting on communication: and in particular, as was already stated, for an analysis of the views conditioning all "communication about communication".

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[1] We should also note that we do not have access to the views shared by the inhabitants of 18th-century France. What we can achieve in such a communication history is the construction of the views of a historical French community from the 18th century. This will not be a reconstruction, but a construction – our own views of their views. To assert that we are able to reconstruct the views of historical communities would be at odds with the postulate of "historicizing communication" and recognising its self-referentiality.

5. Three aspects of the research subject of communication history

The presentation of the diagram of the research subject of communication history serves as a basis for a "mind map" that will make the discussion of historical research on communication easier. This is a heuristic tool which above all serves to demonstrate that research into communication should not be limited to media studies. Of course, assuming the historicity of communication and the "communication about communication", I cannot claim a right to the universal validity of this diagram – my proposal must naturally fulfil the conditions which it places upon itself. The diagram of these three aspects is an expression of the views of a researcher reflecting upon research into communication from the perspective of the 21st century.

This also means, that there could be more, or fewer, of these aspects, and that their number depends primarily on how we define communication itself as well as on the types of study we undertake. The highlighting of these three fields – and, therefore, the criterion for selecting these and not others – depends primarily on the manner of defining communication in contemporary studies and on the non-reducibility of individual aspects to one another.[1] For instance, research into the historical collective views of communication practices is not reducible to research into the historical communication practices (these aspects are mutually-constitutive).

In the following three subsections, I shall sketch each of these aspects, concentrating on the assumptions that are made and the dominant perspectives in research.

5.1. Means and forms of communication practices

As part of this aspect, communication is viewed from the standpoint of its means and forms, understood as something that mediates between the participants in communication[2] (often called the sender and the receiver). I have called research that approaches communication in a historical manner and emphasises this particular aspect, *media history*.

The subject areas of this type of communication history are: (1) any tools that are used for communication (2) any forms of communication and

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[1] I have used a procedure, proposed and employed by Robert T. Craig, amongst others, when reconstructing the tradition of communication studies. Craig however, placed the emphasis on research perspectives within which communication is studied. Using the rule of non-reducibility, he defined seven main traditions. See, in particular: "Communication Theory as a Field" (Craig 1999).

[2] Naturally, *means and forms* are not the only topic of media studies analyses. For many centuries, the *medium*, understood as something that mediates between a subject and an object, has been studied by philosophers (Alić 2010: 201–210).

their emergence, i.e., for instance the way the culture changes itself under the influence of these tools.

This aspect is most often taken up in communication research. This is due to two reasons: (1) the historical research concerning a given medium has been conducted for many centuries (e.g. as part of the implicit and explicit communication history, we write the history of the press published); (2) *communication studies* – thanks to the efforts of Wilbur Schramm – achieved their autonomy and disciplinary grounding in the 20th century in journalism and media departments – this turn of communication studies towards the media is called the "Schramm Legacy" (Rogers & Chaffee 1993: 126).

Within research into this aspect (on the theoretical level), we can define two dominant perspectives: the former concentrates on the description and elucidation of a given medium – a micro-history of means; the latter focuses on the social changes resulting from the use of a particular medium or media – this is a macro-history of forms.

The study of *means* includes reflection on the appearance of speech among hominids, language, the first cave paintings, the emergence of the first alphabets, the telegraph and television, right up to modern social media. Klaus Bruhn Jensen differentiates between three levels of means (he simply calls them media). This classification is very clear and useful:

> *Media of the first degree* – verbal language and other forms of expression which depend on the presence of the human body in local time-space;
> *Media of the second degree* – technically reproduced or enhanced forms of representation and interaction which support communication across space and time, from print to telegraphy and broadcasting;
> *Media of the third degree* – the digitally processed forms of representation and interaction which reproduce and recombine all previous media on a single platform (Jensen 2002: 97).

Which is why the object of analysis can be a specific alphabet, a certain type of telegraph or television – e.g. digital and not terrestrial. These are often histories written from the point of view of a specific nation, group, or region, which is why James Curran writes that such a history reminds us of "an early sixteenth century European map, in which the home country is at the center of the universe and the periphery is charted through 'overseas missions'"(Curran 2008: 48).

This is why the study of the second element of this aspect – *form* – is so attractive: it gives the opportunity to sketch a broader perspective. These types of macro-histories are for instance written within the framework of technological determinism.[1] The analysis of the history of cultural changes is carried out with a focus on changes affecting the form of the communication practices. It shows how the emergence of writing, and with it the transition from an oral culture to a written one, changed perceptions of time, space and social organisation (e.g. Harold Innis showed that the use of clay tablets for administrative tasks – as a consequence of the difficulty of their use, but also their durability – led to the limited territorial reach of the societies using them as a medium). Such perspectives are often accused of mono-causality and the reification of the medium in the process of explaining social changes and transformations.

5.2. Collective views of communication practices

It is in the collective views[2] of communication practices that the self-referentiality of communication is most readily discernible. Speaking of the collective views that shape communication practice is in itself a part of another communication practice.

The collective views of a particular community[3] (within a culture) are the ordered contents of the collective experience of the members of that

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[1] The main representatives of technological determinism (often identified with the Toronto School of Communication Theory) are: Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan, Jack Goody, Eric Havelock and Walter Ong.

[2] I will sometimes refer to "collective views", and at other times simply to "views". In both cases, I mean "the same" views, since what is implied is not some "individual view", but always the perceived views of the members of a given community as a whole.

[3] By "collective views", I mean those ways of organizing the collective experience which Émile Durkheim calls *collective representations.* In his view, collective representations "express collective realities; rituals are ways of acting that are generated only within assembled groups and are meant to stimulate and sustain or recreate certain mental states in these groups" (Durkheim, 2001, p. 11). Referencing Durkheim in this case – as shown by Eric W. Rothenbuler in his article demonstrating the usefulness of the terminological apparatus of the French sociologist for communication theory – is perfectly justified (Rothenbuhler 1993: 158–163). Naturally, the French thinker's ideas have been developed, for example, by Serge Moscovici (who wrote about *social representations* and their role in communication); accounts that refer to the ways of organizing the collective experience and that build on Durkheim are also to be found in the works of the Annales school, Philippe Ariès or Robert Mandrou. Within this tradition, one encounters such terms as *collective representations*, *collective ideas, collective attitudes* or *collective views*; sometimes one also hears *mentalité* or *mental equipment*. In my considerations, I use the term *views*, so as to avoid false connotations and to stress that the ways of organizing the collective unconsciousness (*mentalité*) include, among others, representations, understatements that

community (a given "image of the world"). Within these collective views, we can identify a series of separate representations linked to various areas of culture (or more precisely: to various areas of social practices). For instance, we can distinguish religious views, artistic views, and the views of the state. These determine the ways of realising religious practices, artistic practices, and the practices of functioning within a state. Within the image of the world of a particular society, we can pinpoint – and this is crucial not only to communication scholars – communicative views, or to put it another way, *views on communication practices*.[1]

These communicative views describe the manner of engaging in communication practices and can be explained only through an interpretation of these practices, as realised through the means and forms. Naturally, apart from these views, other factors also influence these practices (e.g. external surroundings, latitude). Due to the exceptional status of communication as such (its self-referentiality), the study of the relationships between the images of the world and the communicative views is vital to understanding the functioning of the societies. This is why it is useful to employ the tools developed in the philosophy of culture by Ernst Cassirer. The German philosopher is one of the most important representatives of the philosophy of culture and the philosophy of symbolic forms. He viewed culture as a system of symbolic forms (such as art, myth, religion or science) that can be understood on the basis of another symbolic form, namely, language. Although in his account, he did not use the concept of communication, his way of thinking can easily be translated into thinking about *communication*. In the above analyses, I have assumed that communication practices can be understood within a given culture (as it results from my *constitutive view of communication*) and that, at the same time (in accordance with James Carey's assertion quoted above) they make possible the functioning of other types of social practices. That is why Cassirer's approach to the development of language understood as a symbolic form can become a heuristically useful tool, when analyzing the history of communication.

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express the collective accounts of the world, images, myths and values that are accepted by a given community or that affect it.

[1] When writing about the collective views of communication practices, I am using a certain type of shorthand. For I also mean the views on forms and means, as well as the views on communicative views (i.e. those relating to the self-referentiality of communication).

Historically perceived, the collective views on communication practices are studied as a part of the *history of the idea of communication*. Within such collective views, we can define two main types:

1. commonsensical views of communication practices;
2. theoretical views of communication practices;
   a. precommunicological views,
   b. communicological views,

Reflection on the *commonsensical views of communication practices* focuses on what "regular" participants in communication think about their actions. Of course, for the most part, we remain unaware of the views that define the way in which these practices are realised (we do not need to know what persuasion consists of, and what types of speech can be defined, in order to speak in public). The definition of these views – and in reality, the construction of views about views[1] – depends on their extraction from the established – thanks to forms and means – practices (e.g. letters, treatises, magazines) or descriptions of communication practices (descriptions of disputes, speeches). Naturally, we do not have direct access to the commonsensical views of communication shared by the members of historical communities. This is why in creating methods for investigating these views, scholars of communication can, for instance, use the legacy of the Annales School and the concept of *mentalités* which it analysed. In the area of communication studies this type of analysis is undertaken for example by Peter Burke (1993).

The study of the *theoretical views of communication practices* is an easier task, since it consists in the study of considerations on what modern scholars term "communication". Most often, these theoretical views are preserved in the form of treatises, letters, philosophical discourses, and now communication theories.

I have distinguished two types of such theoretical views, in keeping with the distinction of the implicit and the explicit history of communication in the disciplinary order itself. This is why the history of the precommunicological collective views inquires into how communication was imagined in the writings of ancient philosophers, medieval theologians or British empiricists, that is, it studies these views prior to the emergence of

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[1]A separate question is whether this type of historical study should be carried out as part of social history, for instance, or other disciplines. In this article, I am leaning towards the view that the history of commonsensical views of communication practices can be studied precisely within the realm of communicology, which takes into account and emphasises the self-referentiality of the subject in question.

a research discipline investigating communication. This type of research, showing the influence of the precommunicological views on the communicological views, can be found in the work of John Durham Peters (2001). We should be mindful that these established theoretical views do not tell us how a given community thought about communication, but merely how a given scholar imagined this communication.

The most investigated theoretical views are those that I have termed *communicological*. These are views expressed in the theories of communication, and so their birth can be traced to the first half of the 20th century. Research on the history of communication theories, the emergence of particular positions and the mutual interpenetrations of schools of thought, appeared alongside the emergence and dissemination of the first theories of communication: Sergei Stepanowitsch Tschachotin's concept, the Shannon-Weaver mathematical theory of communication, Theodore Newcombe's model, etc.

Not only specific theories and schools of thought, but also theorists themselves, as well as the schools and the currents from which they emerged, can become topics of research (Rogers 1997). This is why we can treat Jürgen Habermas' philosophy of communication, for instance, as a further stage in the development of the Frankfurt School, understood as a critical tradition in communication studies.

5.3. Communication practices

The three aspects identified in this article can only be separated on the theoretical level. During the course of actual communication, both the means and the form as well as the views are inextricably linked. However, the emphasis on a particular aspect in historical studies determines the way in which particular analyses are carried out.

The relationship between (1) communication as the research subject of communication history and (2) the communication practices as an aspect of this subject, needs to be clarified. We should stress that in historical research on communication we do not analyse a single, particular communicative action (e.g. a specific speech given to soldiers by their commander on the battlefield) in abstraction from the wider socio-historical context. Such an action is always considered within a broader perspective of similar communicative actions, and, thus, communication practices, since these are (1) regulated by the collective views of communication practices and (2) implemented through the means and forms. This of course also applies to each individual communicative action. However, in historical

research, we are interested in actions as individual realisations of a broader communicative practice.

Since we can abstract neither from the collective views nor from the means and forms, what is the subject of the research that emphasises this particular aspect of communication, i.e, communication practice, concerned with? What is primarily studied are the elements and characteristics of the communication that can be distinguished on the theoretical level, such as: the participants in communication (sometimes reduced to a "sender" and a "receiver"), the rationality and purpose of the action, the statement, the message, the function or the result of communication as well as the principles of effectiveness.

Communication practices have been studied for many centuries, although they have not always been investigated as part of communication studies. A classic example of this is rhetoric, and various analyses of persuasion and argumentation. In such studies, the emphasis is not on which views regulate the practice, or on the structures and functions of language, but on the manner of speaking itself, the rhetorical figures used, the manner of constructing an argument. This is why Aristotle's rhetorical analyses fall within the domain of communication studies, while the history of rhetoric can be included in communication history. Though we ought to stress here that the rhetorical tradition has only relatively recently been regarded as a part of communication studies.

We should therefore ask: what type of research can be proposed for each of these three aspects? In other words: what would research on the "same" communication look like when one of these three aspects is emphasised. When analysing the disciplinary order of communication history, I indicated the subject level (composed of the three aspects defined above), the theoretical level and the meta-theoretical level. Using the example of the publishing of the press in 18th-century France, I showed how these levels should be understood (see above the section entitled "Research perspective").

In relation to the *research subject*, we can say that studies which emphasise the means and forms of communication practices concentrate on: (1) a micro-history of means – on the quantitative aspects of publishing (printing press output, number of workers), the shape of the tools (types of printing presses), distribution and readers (distribution channels, number of readers etc.); (2) a macro-history of forms – social changes that result from the use of printing presses (the birth of public opinion), the development of

readership (accessibility to various publications) and the resulting transformations of the social classes.

Research in the field of communication history that emphasises views of communication practices can, for instance, concentrate on the topics of the articles, and describe what the inhabitants of France at that time found worthy of being written about in the press, and thereby worthy of being communicated. The collective views described are the commonsensical views of communication practices.

An analysis of the publishing of the press emphasising the communication practices within communication history can concentrate on the circulation of the content, a description of the receivers (readers) as well as on sketching a collective portrait of journalists in 18th-century France. Naturally, it cannot abstract from the means and forms as well as the commonsensical views (in the same way than an analysis of the means cannot abstract from the communication practices etc. – the triad of these three aspects is inseparable). However, an emphasis on communication practices foregrounds the effect and goal of a given communication practice, and therefore answers questions such as: "What influence did the 18th-century press have on government and society?"

6. Prospects for further research

The research problem addressed in this article concerns the possibility of schematising what is studied in communication history. The goal of the article was to show that what has been called the collective views on communication practices is also a key aspect of research into communication studies and cannot be abstracted from. This type of analysis can employ the tools and apparatus of philosophy.

Showing the relationship between the views, practices, forms and means was possible by taking a bird's eye view and differentiating between the two orders: (1) the disciplinary one (that distinguishes between: the research subject, the theoretical level and the meta-theoretical level) and (2) the research subject order, i.e., the three aspects of the research subject of communication history: the views, practices, means and forms.

The representation of this triadic perspective makes it possible to sketch a mind map accounting for multiple positions. We should however stress that this is a map that relates to historical studies of communication. In other words: using it within contemporary theories analysing communication in the "here and now" is of course possible – but would require a modification of the diagram.

The three aspects highlight the most important elements of communication. However, the considerations presented here are conducted on the meta-theoretical level. Two issues, above all, relating to the analysis of the collective views and the communication practices, require further research and development (on the theoretical level).

Firstly, it has to be shown how to analyse the collective views on communication in such a way so as to fulfil the assumptions regarding the self-referentiality and historicity of the "communication about communication". In the article, I have indicated that it is possible to use the legacy of the Annales School in a manner similar to that of Peter Burke. However, these types of study concentrate above all on commonsensical views. The research of John Durham Peters – conducted in the history of the idea of communication – concentrates on the precommunicological views, while Everett M. Rogers focuses on the communicological views. The challenge is to study the influence of these three types of views on one another within particular historical communities. That work would require not only further analysis of the triadic approach to the research subject, but above all, a reflection situated at the junction of historical methodology and philosophy of culture. However, this matter could not be pursued here due to the necessary limitations of the present paper.

The second issue that requires further analysis is the proposal of a research methodology for the study of transformations in the communication practices and the influence of these transformations on the social factors that condition them. The transformation of the practices entail reformulations of their crucial elements – that is why it is crucial to examine how these transformation affect the relations and correlations between a "sender" and a "receiver" in communication that is understood constitutively. The present conclusions can serve as a basis for further analyses within communication history and the metatheory of communication, while the three-aspect diagram indicates the role of philosophy in these studies.

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