

In the Age of Digital Social Media, What is the Role of the Catholic Church?

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[Abstract] Our Lord Jesus Christ commanded his disciples (and thus us subsequently) to spread the news to all the peoples in the world. So we can say that the Christian Church has from the very beginning borne the mission of communicating to everybody. The Church can be seen as one of the earliest institutions established mainly as an institution for communication. In 1622, when Propaganda Fide was established, the Church intended to equip herself to be a more professional body of communication, to meet the needs of the new communication model relating to the new world. In the 21st century when social media becomes popular all over the world, Church members cannot avoid studying the important issues of the impact and the pros and cons of social media in the history of human communications. It is also the main approach of my paper here. Regarding the studies of communication, political and media ideologies are important issues which most mass media scholars will not neglect. Therefore, the studies of social media will reasonably bring us to the discussion of the question: What is the role of social media in the context of political and media ideologies? Regarding media ideology, I would like to cite two important streams of thinking to enhance the discussion. One is the challenge to media ideology posed by Marxist scholars, and the other is the challenge to media ideology by Catholic Social Teaching. When we differentiate between “proclaiming good news” and “disseminating fake news,” it is necessary for us to work on the changing concept of the term “Propaganda,” which was treasured by the Catholic community at least dating from 1622 and until the new era after World War II. I will elaborate on why the Catholic Church eventually changed the name from “propaganda” to “evangelization of peoples.” Through the above discussion, I hope to make certain suggestions in response to the following questions: What is the role of the Catholic Church in the digital age? What can we do to enhance true understanding through mass media? What can we do to enhance true understanding through social media? What can we do to enhance true understanding through human communication?

“Go into all the World and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.” (Mark 16:15)

Our Lord Jesus Christ commanded his disciples to spread the Good News of Salvation to all the peoples in the world. So we can say that the Christian Church has from the very beginning borne the mission of communicating to everybody. The Church can be seen as one of the earliest institutions established mainly as an institution for communication.

To go into all the world and proclaim means that the Catholic Church at the very beginning is mandated to be an international communication entity. From this angle, in 1622, when the *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* (SCPF) was established, it can be seen as one of the important steps for the Church to equip herself to be a more professional body of international communication. And this time is to meet the needs of the new communication model relating to the new world.

The Importance of SCPF in the Development of Communication in Human History

Professor Chen Lidan (陳力丹), a prominent scholar of communication studies in China, also pointed out that in the history of human propagation, the majority part is presented as religious propagation, so that even the word “propaganda” in modern Western world came from the Church.¹

Chen also reminded us that even in Karl Marx and Engels’ book *Die deutsche Ideologie*, they also mentioned that “Congregatio de propaganda fides” as the professional propagation organization of the Church.²

The Catholic Church uses this term “Propaganda” which is equivalent to the term “evangelization.” Hamelink, a prominent scholar on mass communication, reminded us that the original meaning of the term “Propaganda” is,

In the seventeenth-century Pope Gregory XV in 1622 founded the Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide. The Congregation received among its briefs the call to propagate the Catholic Faith to the New World. In 1627 Pope Urban VII established a special training centre, the Collegium Urbanum de Propaganda Fide

¹ Chen Lidan, (陳力丹), *On Spiritual Communication: The Theories of Communication by Marx and Engels* (《精神交往論——馬克思恩格斯的傳播觀》) (Beijing: Kai Ming Publication Press (開明出版社), 1993), 129.

² Chen Lidan, *On Spiritual Communication*, 129.

(傳信大學), where catholic propagandists received their training before spreading their religious ideas across the world.³

Unfortunately, however, the importance of the relations between propaganda and communication had been deeply underestimated in the Catholic Church. Sometimes even scholars in communication studies also overlooked the importance of the SCPF. Stanley J. Baran and Dennis K. Davis in their book *Mass Communication Theory: Foundations, Ferment, and Future* in 2003 did mention the SCPF. They wrote,

“Propaganda was not an American invention. The term originated in the sixteenth century during the Counter-Reformation and was first used by the Society for the Propagation of the Faith – the Jesuits.”⁴

Clearly, the authors made a great mistake by mixing the SCPF with the Jesuits (耶穌會).⁵ Even Stanley Baran commits such a mistake, we can understand how far the issue of Propaganda Fide was neglected by the lay people in the world.

But not everybody misunderstood the original meaning of “propaganda.” Even during the First World War, some US politicians still would like to revitalize the original meaning of the term “propaganda.” Hamelink recalled that,

In April 1917 US President Woodrow Wilson established the Committee on Public Information (CPI) and appointed George Creel, a newspaper man, to be the chair. Creel urged the president to use propaganda in the true sense of the word, meaning the “propagation of faith.”⁶

Changes of Meaning on “Propaganda” as New Technology Emerged

Another prominent scholar of mass communication Daya Kishan Thussu linked up international communication with the development of new technologies. He even related it with the new meaning of the term “Propaganda.” He wrote:

³ C.J. Hamelink, *Global Communication*, (London, SAGE, 2015), 155.

⁴ Baran Stanley and Dennis K. Davis, *Mass Communication Theory: Foundations, Ferment, and Future* 3rd ed. (Belmont, Calif: Thomson/Wadsworth, 2003), 71.

⁵ Anthony Lam, “Establishment of Propaganda Fide in 1622 and its Impact on Evolving Catholic Missionary Works in the Far East.” Paper presented at the Symposium hosted by the Department of History, Fu Jen University, November 2013.

⁶ C.J. Hamelink, *Global Communication*, 155.

The strategic significance of international communication grew with the expansion of the new medium of radio. From the outset, its use for propaganda was an integral part of its development, with its power to influence values, beliefs and attitudes (Taylor, 2003; Welch, 2014; Jowett and O'Donnell, 2015). During the First World War, the power of radio was quickly recognized as vital, both to the management of public opinion at home and for propaganda abroad, directed at allies and enemies alike. As noted by a well-known writer on propaganda: "During the war period it came to be recognized that the mobilization of men and means was not sufficient; there must be mobilization of opinion. Power over opinion, as over life and property, passed into official hands" (Lasswell, 1927:14).⁷

On the other hand, Hamelink stressed that the mission of the CPI, in the minds of Wilson and Creel, was to manage American public opinion towards support for participation in the First World War.⁸ In his memoirs, Creel wrote: "In no degree was the Committee an agency of censorship, a machinery of concealment or repression. Its emphasis throughout was on the open and the positive. At no point did it seek or exercise authorities under those war laws that limited the freedom of speech and press. In all things, from first to last, without halt or change, it was a plain publicity proposition, a vast enterprise in salesmanship, the world's greatest adventures in advertising."⁹

But Creel also pointed out that "We did not call it propaganda, for that word, in German hands, had come to be associated with deceit and corruption. Our effort was educational and informative throughout, for we had such confidence in our case as to feel that no other argument was needed than the simple, straightforward presentation of the facts."¹⁰

"Propaganda" in the 20th Century

Actually, the concept of "propaganda" was not a modern thing. According to Hamelink, the use of propaganda messages in international relations was well known in antiquity. Alexander the Great had what amounted to a public relations unit. "Reports written to

⁷ D. K. Thussu, *International Communication: Continuity and Changes*, 3rd Ed. (NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), 14.

⁸ C.J. Hamelink, *Global Communication*, 155.

⁹ George Creel, *How We Advertised America: The First Telling of the Amazing Story of the Committee on Public Information that Carried the Gospel of Americanism to Every Corner of the Globe*. New York: Harper, 1920. Quoted by Hamelink, *Global Communication*, 156.

¹⁰ George Creel, *How We Advertised America*, Quoted by Hamelink, *Global Communication*, 156.

serve his ends were sent to the Macedonian court, multiplied there and disseminated with propagandistic intent.”¹¹ Propaganda has been systematically carried out since the 15th century.¹²

The 18th century in particular provides many illustrations of hostile propaganda. It witnessed the work of one of history’s greatest propagandists, Napoleon. “He engaged in a veritable propaganda battle with the rest of Europe, a battle of big words.”¹³

Napoleon communicated selectively with foreign countries. The open appeal to the civilian population was something fundamentally new. Thus in 1796, he directed a manifesto to the Tyroleans to give up ‘the hopeless cause’ of their emperor.¹⁴

As I mentioned before, for Creel, the term “propaganda” had come to be associated with deceit and corruption. To what extent it is so bad, we can see the elaboration of Thussu. He wrote,

By the time of the Nazis came to power in Germany in 1933, radio broadcasting had become an extension of international diplomacy. The head of Hitler’s Propaganda Ministry, Josef Goebbels, believed in the power of radio broadcasting as a tool of propaganda: “Real broadcasting is true propaganda. Propaganda means fighting on all battlefields of the spirit, generating, multiplying, destroying, exterminating, building and undoing. Our propaganda is determined by what we call German race, blood and nation’ (quoted in Hale, 1975:2). In 1935, Nazi Germany turned its attention to disseminating worldwide the racist and anti-Semitic ideology of the Third Reich. The Nazi *Reichsender* Broadcasts were targeted at Germans living abroad, as far afield as South America and Australia. These short-wave transmissions were rebroadcast by Argentina, home to many Germans. Later, the Nazis expanded their international broadcasting to include several languages, including Afrikaans, Arabic and Hindustani and, by 1945, German radio was broadcasting in more than fifty languages.¹⁵

Joseph Turow, another prominent scholar of mass communication, reminded us that laboratory work started in Germany during the 1880s and continued in the United States, Scotland, Russia, and other countries throughout the next several decades. Between 1935

¹¹ C.J. Hamelink, *Global Communication*, 155.

¹² C.J. Hamelink, *Global Communication*, 155.

¹³ C.J. Hamelink, *Global Communication*, 155.

¹⁴ C.J. Hamelink, *Global Communication*, 155.

¹⁵ D. K. Thussu, *International Communication*, 15.

and 1938, the Nazi government in Germany operated the world's first regular television service, sending propaganda broadcasts to specially equipped theaters.¹⁶

In Fascist Italy, under Benito Mussolini, a Ministry of Print and Propaganda was created to promote Fascist ideals and win public opinion for colonial campaigns such as the invasion of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) in 1935, and support for Francisco Franco's Fascists during the Spanish Civil War (1936-39). Mussolini also distributed radio sets to Arabs, tuned to only one station – *Radio Bari* in southern Italy. This propaganda prompted the British Foreign Office to create monitoring unit of the BBC to listen in to international broadcasts and later to start an Arabic language service to the region.¹⁷

Thussu gives a fair elaboration to all parties during the WWII. He quoted other scholars that the Second World War saw an explosion in international broadcasting as a propaganda tool on both sides.¹⁸

The Second World War led to an enormous expansion of radio propaganda and this continued in the years after the war. "As the dynamics of world politics were being played out, international radio broadcasting became a prominent weapon in the arsenal of propaganda."¹⁹ In response to harmful broadcasting, there were attempts to impede the reception of radio signals from abroad. "Jamming" has been practiced by many countries. Governments have tried to manipulate the effective receiving range of radio sets. Usually, most of these attempts have not been very successful.²⁰

The Cold War – War of Propaganda from the Opposite Blocs

The defeat of Nazism and militarism of Japan was accompanied by the US-proclaimed victory of democracy and the creation of the United Nations system. Though the 1947 UN General Assembly Resolution 110 (II) condemned "all forms of propaganda which are designed or likely to provoke or encourage any threat to the peace, breach of the

¹⁶ J. Turow, *Media Today: Mass Communication in a Converging World* (6th Ed.), (New York: Routledge, 2016), 367.

¹⁷ Thussu, *International Communication*, 15.

¹⁸ Thussu, *International Communication*, 15.

¹⁹ Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion* (London: SAGE Publications, 1986), 86.

²⁰ C.J. Hamelink, *Global Communication*, 157.

peace, or act of aggression,” both camps indulged in regular propaganda as the battle lines of the Cold War were being drawn.²¹

In the same year (1947), the Soviet Union revived Comintern (Communist International) as Cominform (Communist Information Bureau), to organize a worldwide propaganda campaign orchestrated by the Administration of Agitation and Propaganda (AGITROP) of the Communist Party Central Committee. Communist propaganda, a central component of post-war Soviet diplomacy, was primarily aimed at the Eastern bloc, and increasingly, to what came to be known as the Third World.²²

By the late 1960s, Moscow Radio was the world’s largest single international broadcaster – between 1969 and 1972 it broadcast more program hours than the United States. In addition, it used more languages – eighty-four – than any other international broadcaster, partly because the Soviet Union itself was a multilingual country. Between 1950 and 1973 external broadcasting from the Soviet Union grew from 533 hours to around 1,950 hours per week.²³

On the other side, US broadcasting propaganda was also everywhere all over the world. According to Thussu, although the VOA had been a part of US diplomacy during the Second World War, with the advent of the Cold War, propaganda became a crucial component of US foreign broadcasting. The key instruments of US international broadcasting – VOA, RL and RFE, and the American Forces Network – were all state-funded. The VOA was the official mouthpiece of the US Government, the largest single element in the US Information Agency (USIA) and ultimately answerable to the US State Department.²⁴

In the United States, propaganda was part of what John Martin, a former researcher for the USIA, called “facilitative communication’ which he defined as ‘activity that is designed to keep lines open and to maintain them against the day when they will be needed for propaganda purposes.’”²⁵ This included press releases, seminars, conferences and exhibitions, as well as books, films, educational and cultural exchange programs and scholarships for technical and scientific research.²⁶

²¹ D. K. Thussu, *International Communication*, 16.

²² D. K. Thussu, *International Communication*, 16.

²³ D. K. Thussu, *International Communication*, 17.

²⁴ D. K. Thussu, *International Communication*, 18.

²⁵ D. K. Thussu, *International Communication*, 18.

²⁶ D. K. Thussu, *International Communication*, 18.

During the Vietnam War, US propaganda reached new heights. The joint US Public Office became the delegated authority for all propaganda activities, the chief aims of which were to undermine the support for communists and to keep the support of the South Vietnamese. These messages were conveyed mainly through dropping leaflets and broadcasting from low-flying aircraft.²⁷

D. Croteau and W. Hoynes remind us that a quarter century later, the uses of propaganda during World War II prompted more concern about the distribution of information in the media. The United States used the forum of the United Nations to promote a policy that allowed for the international collection, sale, and distribution of information worldwide.²⁸

The Need to Protect Good International Communication

Glenn Sparks, a scholar of modern world communication, interpreted Marshall McLuhan's understanding of the history of human communication, saying McLuhan saw the history of the human race in terms of eras of communication.²⁹ According to Sparks, McLuhan divided the history into three stages: the Tribal Age, the Print Age and the Electronic Age.³⁰

Obviously, the Congregation of Propaganda Fide is an outcome of the Print Era. Therefore, at the very beginning, the polyglot-printing office of the SCPF was put into service, to produce the printed material urgently needed by missionaries working in remote regions.³¹ The press apostolate was acting as an important means for communicating the faith.³²

SCPF has been very successful in working as a prominent leader in the Print Era. According to Wikipedia, The Bible is the most popular book ever printed in Human

²⁷ D. K. Thussu, *International Communication*, 24.

²⁸ D. Croteau and W. Hoynes, *Media / Society: Industries, Images, and Audiences* (6th Ed.) (Washington, DC: CQ Press, AA Division of Sage, 2019), 361.

²⁹ G. G. Sparks, *Media Effects Research: A Basic Overview* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2004), 202.

³⁰ G.G. Sparks, *Media Effects Research*, 202-206.

³¹ Henkel, W., 1971, 'The Polyglot Printing-office of the Congregation', in Metzler, J., (ed), *Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide Memoria Rerum, 350 Anni A Servizio Delle Missioni, 1622-1972, Vol. I/1 1622-1700* (Rome: Herder Press, 1971), 335-349.

³² Anthony Lam, "Establishment of Propaganda Fide in 1622 and its Impact on Evolving Catholic Missionary Works in the Far East." Paper presented at the Symposium hosted by the Department of History, Fu Jen University, November 2013.

history. SCPF has been playing a very significant role in this aspect.³³ For the Congregation of Propaganda Fide, however, publication work has been always deeply interrelated with inter-personal communication. That is why this congregation pays so much effort to the formation of evangelization and preaching, including the University Urbano. Amid this formation, language training is always an important part. One example is Cardinal Grégoire-Pierre Agagianian, a former prefect of the Congregation. “He was a remarkable linguist, speaking about 12 languages, many of them fluently – his native Russian, Italian, English, French, German, Spanish, Classical Hebrew and Greek, Armenian and Latin.”³⁴

Early in 1971, Fr. Metzler made a very inspiring evaluation on the work of the SCPF:

To convert heathens meant the same as saving them from eternal damnation. We find the same thought applied to bringing heretics and schismatics back to the Catholic Church. It was with this argument that the Congregation tried to inspire its missionaries to greater zeal. It was in this that the Congregation saw the need and obligation for Mission. In spite of this confusion of ideas, which was conditioned by times, and in spite of the failure in practice to make the distinction, already acknowledged from the beginning, between the conversion of heathens and the return of non-Catholics to Church Unity, the foundation of the Congregation de Propaganda Fide remains the truly great deed of Gregory XV and it is a turning point in Mission and Church History.³⁵

Talking about “bringing heretics and schismatics back to the Catholic Church,” it implies that, from the very beginning, the mission of “Propaganda Fide” had been to fight against fake communication. In the 20th Century, its mission included fighting against “political propaganda.”

From Propaganda Fide to Congregation of Evangelization to Peoples

The Vatican II Council, which was held from 1962 to 1965, enhanced a series of “modernization”. During and after the Council, the Catholic Church decided to give the Propaganda Fide a new name, so that people could identify its clear standing against

³³ Bible: <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible>>

³⁴ “Death of Cardinal Agagianian,” *Sunday Examiner*, May 28, 1971, 8.

³⁵ J. Metzler, “Foundation of the Congregation ‘de Propaganda Fide’ by Gregory XV,” in J. Metzler, (ed.), *Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide Memoria Rerum, 350 Anni A Servizio Delle Missioni, 1622-1972*, Vol. I 1622-1700, (Rome: Herder Press, 1971), 96.

“propaganda.” On October 7, 1965, Council participants examined the proposal regarding the SCPF. On October 12, it came to the time of voting.³⁶

Cardinal Suenens evaluated the pro and con of the Pontifical Urbaniana University and pointed out that most bishops of Asia and Africa were bring-up from it. Such one source selection is not so satisfactory. Some prelates also suggested to change the name as “Propaganda” will arouse a huge bad feeling from people.³⁷

On December 7, 1965, Council leaders promulgated the *Decretum De Activitate Missionali Ecclesiae*, which is also known as “Ad Gentes Divinitus,” (AG). In it the role of Propaganda Fide has been clearly stated:

For all missions and for the whole of missionary activity there should be only one competent office, namely that of the “Propagation of the Faith,” which should direct and coordinate, throughout the world, both missionary work itself and missionary cooperation. However, the law of the Oriental Churches is to remain untouched. (AG 29)

In “Ad Gentes Divinitus,” the Council prelates also encourage the SCPF to become “an instrument of administration and an organ of dynamic direction, which makes use of scientific methods and means suited to the conditions of modern times, always taking into consideration present - day research in matters of theology, of methodology and missionary pastoral procedure.” (AG 29)

Similarly, the “Ad Gentes Divinitus” also reminds the SCPF to maintain its mission as a communication organization. It reads,

In the direction of this office, an active role with a deliberative vote should be had by selected representatives of all those who cooperate in missionary work: ... This office should have available a permanent group of expert consultors, of proven knowledge and experience, whose duty it will be, among other things to gather pertinent information about local conditions in various regions, and about the thinking of various groups of men) as well as about the means of evangelization to be used. They will then propose scientifically based conclusions for mission work and cooperation. (AG 29)

³⁶ Chan Man Yu (陳文裕), *A Brief History of the Vatican II Council* (梵蒂岡第二屆大公會議簡史) (Taipei: Sapientia Press, 1989), 192.

³⁷ Chan Man Yu, *A Brief History of the Vatican II Council*, 192.

Facing the reality of confusion meaning of the term “propaganda,” the Council members considered changing the name of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide. After the Council, the Congregation of Propaganda Fide was given a new name. In Vatican Document AAS 59 (1967) LXVI *Nuova definizione della competenza della S. Congregazione*, Article 81 states:

Quae hucusque nuncupata est Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide, in posterum appellabitur Sacra Congregatio pro Gentium Evangelizatione seu de Propaganda Fide. (Caput IX 81)

The new name in Latin is “*Congregatio pro Gentium Evangelizatione*.” *Gentium* means peoples, and *Evangelizatione* is simply “evangelization.”

Up to the turn of centuries, The SCPF is the biggest communication entity in the world. In a news release in 2006 by a Catholic communication office in the Archdiocese of Bombay, it listed out the following figures.

At present, this would cover about 64 million square kilometers in the five continents where the Catholic population totals 185 million. In this area there are some 1,100 dioceses and other ecclesiastical units; 2,400 bishops in active service or retired; 85,000 priests; 450,000 religious women; 28,000 religious brothers and 1.65 million catechists. Candidates to the priesthood receive spiritual and academic formation in 280 major and 110 minor seminaries with 65,000 major seminarians and 85,000 minor seminarians. In the mission territories the Catholic Church runs 90,000 educational institutes; 1600 hospitals; 6,000 clinics; 780 leprosaria and 24,000 social and welfare institutions.³⁸

What Happened in the 21st Century?

Obviously the new SCPF has been working as an active participant in the world of mass media. But the above citation also reflected that the SCPF did not notice any weight of social media which emerged quickly in the 21st Century. As the power of social media becomes popular all over the world, Church members cannot avoid studying the important issues of the impact and the pros and cons of social media in the history of human communications.

³⁸ Website: <https://archbom.org/>, accessed on May 23, 2006.

Social media is the outcome of the internet. It has brought conveniences in different aspects to our daily life. But it also brings us trouble with confusing information and sometimes even fake news into our worldview.

It is not only the Church leaders who are worrying about the negative impact of social media in the digital age; media scholars have already pointed out the negative outcome regarding over-relying on media social. In 2012, media scholars John Morrish and Paul Bradshaw, when talking about fact-checking, already warned people that “The Internet can be a helpful source of additional information, but it must be used intelligently and critically.”³⁹

Christian Fuchs, a prominent media scholar from Austria, listed numerous limitations of the prominent social media in his book in 2017. Regarding Facebook, he wrote:

THE LIMITS OF FACEBOOK: Technology, sports, music, entertainment and brands are very popular on Facebook. Powerful politicians, such as President Obama, dominate the attention given to the political Facebook groups, whereas alternative political figures, such as Michael Moore, Karl Marx, Noam Chomsky and Jeremy Corbyn, have a much lower number of fans.⁴⁰

Thussu also does not restrain his critic to Facebook. He wrote, “Critics have alleged that Facebook has demonstrated political bias in ‘trending topics’ that were tampered with, privileging liberal views and downgrading conservative news sites. This became a big controversy during the 2016 presidential elections in the United States, where allegations were made about Russian social media interference via what came to be known as ‘fake news’, by misusing platforms such as Facebook to influence campaigning and election results.”⁴¹

By the way, on Google, even President Obama had to give way to the entertainment industry. Fuchs wrote:

THE LIMITS OF GOOGLE: The top search keywords used on Google in 2010 show that the 12 most used keywords did not contain political topics. Instead, there was more interest in Whitney Houston, Gangnam Style, Hurricane Sandy, iPad 3, Diablo 3, Kate Middleton, Olympics 2012, Amanda Todd, Michael Clark Duncan, Big Brother Brazil 12. The most searched Google keywords in 2014 were Robin

³⁹ John Morrish and Paul Bradshaw, *Magazine Editing: In Print and Online* (3rd Ed.) (London: Routledge Press, 2012), 122.

⁴⁰ C. Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction* (2nd Ed.) (London: Sage, 2017), 124.

⁴¹ D. K. Thussu, *International Communication*, 233.

Williams, World Cup, Ebola, Malaysia Airlines, ALS Ice Bucket Challenge, Flappy Bird, Conchita Wurst, ISIS, Frozen, Sochi Olympics. Seven of the most searched keywords have to do with entertainment, two with catastrophes (Ebola virus epidemic, crash of Malaysia Airlines flights 370 and 17) and just one with politics (ISIS).⁴²

The above elaboration just echoed a quite common comment that media, especially social media, as a platform of gossip, are always working as an outlet for people to escape from the unchangeable political realities. But other scholars also point out more problems of Google. In his book in 2019, Thussu mentioned that

The Google algorithm has generated much controversy and various anti-trust authorities across the world have sought to check its unrestrained power to promote and prioritize the products that its algorithm prefers. In 2017, the European Commission fined Google \$2.7 billion, the largest such penalty in the Commission's history, for giving Google's own comparison-shopping service and advantage.⁴³

Toby Miller and Marwan Kraidy already pointed out earlier that the European Union's Court of Justice has ruled that Google must give its citizens a "right to be forgotten," to remove themselves from scrutiny through search engines when the information that emerges about them is spurious. So the happy utopia promised by social media and celebrated by media studies 2.0 is running into some serious resistance.⁴⁴

By the way, Fuchs evaluated Twitter as one of the most popular social media platforms. Blogger Andrew Sullivan wrote after the Iranian protests of 2009 that "the revolution will be twittered" which contributed to the myth of Twitter revolutions. But he also queries that can meaningful political debates be based on 140-character short messages? Short text invites simplistic arguments and is an expression of the commodification and speed-up of culture.⁴⁵

I would like to quote other scholars, however, to counterbalance their claims of the branding of the Twitter Revolution. Miller and Kraidy just remind us that while nowhere were celebrations of the emancipatory magic of digital communication more manifest than in predominant media and academic representations of the popular uprisings and

⁴² C. Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*, 124.

⁴³ D. K. Thussu, *International Communication*, 232.

⁴⁴ Toby Miller and Marwan M. Kraidy, *Global Media Studies* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2016), 88.

⁴⁵ C. Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*, 124-5.

civil wars captured by the rubric of “the Arab Spring,” debates between otherwise sensible people for a while revolved around whether these were “Facebook revolutions” or “Twitter Revolutions.”⁴⁶

Fuchs also reminded us that nine out of the ten most followed Twitter user accounts are entertainment-oriented. Barack Obama is the only exception in the top ten.⁴⁷ May I add one more comment learnt from other scholars: And Jesus is not there!!!

Moreover, we should not forget that in social media, media consumers become media products. Miller and Kraidy point out that Twitter and Facebook sell information about users’ past and present lives and likes, monitoring their every move.⁴⁸

Regarding the power of social media, Croteau and Hoynes related it to media power and ideology. They pointed out that in the end, we have growing oligopolistic corporations –Facebook, Google, Amazon, and the like—who mine our data, feed us our news and entertainment, and deeply affect our understanding of the world through the use of algorithms that shape our online experiences. But rather than conjure up images from dystopian science-fiction novels about an oppressive “Big Brother,” this condition seems to us perfectly normal, ordinary, and in our best interest. That is the power of ideology.⁴⁹

The Miracle of Wikipedia

It is fair to say that we should not underestimate the positive influence of social media. Just as Miller and Kraidy mention that the touchingly old-fashioned Facebook predictably features “Peace on Facebook” that will “decrease world conflict” through intercultural communication. Twitter modestly announces itself to be “a triumph of humanity.”⁵⁰

Surely some social media have even more revolutionary impact as much as communism had done in the past. Fuchs, who is a media scholar fond of Communism in the Western

⁴⁶ Toby Miller and Marwan M. Kraidy, *Global Media Studies*, 85.

⁴⁷ C. Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*, 125.

⁴⁸ Toby Miller and Marwan M. Kraidy, *Global Media Studies*, 41.

⁴⁹ D. Croteau and W. Hoynes, *Media / Society*, 223-4.

⁵⁰ Toby Miller and Marwan M. Kraidy, *Global Media Studies*, 35.

world, pointed out that people can say that Wikipedians are prototypical contemporary communists.⁵¹

The work model of Wikipedia is very charming to some liberals. Fuchs reminded us that the work on Wikipedia is co-operative. No one can reclaim the authorship of an article, as it is often the result of dozens of people writing and debating together about what should be written. Most of the articles have between seven and 21 co-authors (Auray et al. 2007, 194). Wikipedians use a decision-making process that is based on debate and consensus. This method is supported and enabled by the wiki web software, which generates webpages that can be edited by anyone and that support discussion between the users.⁵²

For Fuchs, Communism is not a distant society. It exists to a certain degree in each society. Communism is a dream that the world has always possessed. In this context, Marx says that “the world already possesses the dream of a thing, of which it has only to possess the consciousness to possess it truly” (Marx/Engels Gesamtausgabe (MEGA), Section 3, Vol. 1, 56).⁵³

Of course, the evaluation of Wikipedia is not one-sided. Thussu reminded us that “A study conducted at the Oxford Internet Institute of the University of Oxford showed that Wikipedia, one of the world’s most visible and used encyclopedias, is characterized by uneven and clustered geographies: there is simply not a lot of content about much of the world, it noted, Arabic was the most under-represented major world language on Wikipedia, while sub-Saharan Africa is woefully under-represented in all major languages (Graham et al., 2014).”⁵⁴

Regarding such a series of problems of social media mentioned above, it will reasonably bring us to discuss the role of social media in the context of political and media ideologies. Regarding media ideology, I would like to cite two important streams of thinking to enhance the discussion. One is the challenge to media ideology posed by the Marxist scholars, and the other one is the challenge to media ideology by the Catholic Social Teaching, especially those on Social Communications.

⁵¹ C. Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*, 325.

⁵² C. Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*, 326.

⁵³ C. Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*, 325.

⁵⁴ D. K. Thussu, *International Communication*, 251.

A Dialogue with the Marxist Theory on Social Media

According to McQuail, the message of Marxist theory is plain, but questions remain unanswered. “How might the power of the media be countered or resisted? What is the position of forms of media that are not clearly in capitalist ownership or in the power of the state (such as independent newspapers or public broadcasting)? Critics of mass media in the Marxist tradition either rely on the weapon of exposure of propaganda and manipulation (e.g. Herman and Chomsky, 1988; Herman, 2000) or pin their hopes on some form of collective ownership class. The main contemporary heir to Marxist theory is to be found in political economy theory.”⁵⁵

Ideology is most powerful when it operates at a taken-for-granted level, that is, when things seem obvious and uncontested. In some ways, the internet and related digital technologies have their own ideology. That is, they tend to encourage a way of being that seems commonsensical and “natural,” when, in fact, it is the product of a particular set of social and power relations.⁵⁶

McQuail quoted the classic elaboration by Gouldner in 1976 regarding the relationship between new technology and ideology. It reads as follows:

Gouldner (1976) interpreted key changes in modern political history in terms of communication technology. He connects the rise of ‘ideology’, defined as a special form of rational discourse, to printing and the newspaper, on the grounds that (in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) these stimulated a supply of interpretation and ideas (ideology). He then portrays the later media of radio, film and television as having led to a decline of ideology because of the shift from ‘conceptual to iconic symbolism’, revealing a split between the ‘cultural apparatus’ (the intelligentsia), which produces ideology, and the ‘consciousness industry’, which controls the new mass public. This anticipates a continuing ‘decline in ideology’ as a result of the new computer-based networks of information.⁵⁷

Fairly speaking, Internet inventors and promoters, at the very beginning, may carry goodwill to enhance a fairer and more open global society. But Croteau and Hoynes remind us of the reality that “Fast-forward a half century, and the fruition of this belief system can be seen in the internet. The focus on individual self-empowerment that began as a countercultural value became fused with Silicon Valley capitalism. It morphed into

⁵⁵ D. McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory* (London: Sage, 2010), 96.

⁵⁶ D. Croteau and W. Hoynes, *Media / Society*, 222.

⁵⁷ D. McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, 103.

an approach combining libertarianism and neoliberalism—and ideology supporting the deregulation of industry, the defunding and privatization of public services, and the undermining of labor unions that serve as a bulwark against capitalist exploitation.”⁵⁸

They also pointed out that the media technologies are replacing the traditional belief. They wrote, “As the legitimacy of governments to seriously address major social problems has been undermined, and as other social institutions have been challenged, technology and the associated information society has been hailed by many as a savior, amounting to a ‘techno-redemptive ideology’ (Mattelhart 2003: 152). Representing individual freedom and what another critic calls ‘technological solutionism’ (Morozov 2013), the internet is presented as a neutral ‘platform’ for communication and self-expression; digital technologies and ‘big data’ are touted as the source of solutions for everything ranging from personal troubles to global crises.”⁵⁹

***Communio et Progressio* and Its Trans-temporal Vision**

How can the Catholic Church respond to such new media ecology in the World? My observation is that what we have done to enhance true understanding through mass media in the past can be and should be very helpful for us to explore the ways we can enhance true understanding through social media. Therefore, in the following pages, I would like to quote a few paragraphs from some inspiring church documents. The first one is the *Communio et Progressio* (C et P) in 1971.

In 1971, the Pontifical Social Communication Commission promulgated the “*Communio et Progressio*,” a concrete policy on Mass Media was established. It is a timely instruction on communication media that the main idea still inspiring until now.

The Instruction is written in a very post-modern way with a strong trans-temporal perspective. Section 21 of the document listed eight questions regarding mass communication work which should not be neglected. Such questions are valid for the Church in this digital communication age.

1. How can we ensure that this swift and haphazard and endless stream of news is properly evaluated and understood?

⁵⁸ D. Croteau and W. Hoynes, *Media / Society*, 222.

⁵⁹ D. Croteau and W. Hoynes, *Media / Society*, 222.

2. How, in a society that is committed to the rights of dissent, is the distinction between right and wrong, and true and false, to be made?
3. How in the face of competition to capture a large popular audience are the media to be prevented from appealing to and inflaming the less admirable tendencies in human nature?
4. How can one avoid the concentration of the power to communicate in too few hands so that any real dialogue is killed?
5. How can one avoid allowing communications made indirectly and through machinery to weaken direct human contact – especially when these communications take the form of pictures and images?
6. When the media invite men to escape into fantasy, what can be done to bring them back to present reality?
7. How can one stop the media from encouraging mental idleness and passivity?
8. How can one be certain that the incessant appeal to emotion does not sap reason? (C et P, 21).

These eight questions are not only pointing to the communication work of the Roman Catholic Church, they are also pointing to all communication workers in the world. Therefore, *Communio et Progressio* should not be treated as only a Church document but as an important document on the history of human communication. While we were surprised to see the powerful invasion of the Cyber Network into our real world, we should not be more surprised to see that the *Communio et Progressio*, in 1971, already recognized the problem of how to come back from the hyper world to the real world.

A Counterbalance to the Internet Ideology During the Electronic Era?

Even though the *Communio et Progressio* never mentions the term “internet,” the document did point out the development with deep insight that fit in the new age of the internet. In article 91 it said,

The responsibility of civil authorities over the means of social communication now covers the world, for they have to guarantee the development of social communication for the good of all mankind, and this without selection or discrimination. This development can be secured by the use of international agreements including those that touch on the use of space satellites. (C et P, 91).

SCPF should work with all Catholic mass communication organizations and social media platforms in the world to promote evangelization works.

Communio et Progressio suggests we should do something to prevent the deterioration of the situation. We should let the competent people speak. It foresees that “Well known Catholics who go on the air, whether they are clerical or lay, are automatically regarded as spokespersons of the Church.” (C et P, 154).

For the same reason, *Communio et Progressio* recommends that “Every bishop, all episcopal conferences or bishops’ assemblies and the Holy See itself should each have their own official and permanent spokesperson or press officer to issue the news and give clear explanations of the documents of the Church so that people can grasp precisely what is intended” (C et P, 174). The Hong Kong Catholic Social Communication Office was established in 1973. It was an active response to *Communio et Progressio*.

In 1992, the Pontifical Social Communication Commission promulgated another document, the “*AETATIS NOVAE*” on social communications on the twentieth anniversary of *Communio et Progressio*. In *Aetatis Novae*, the commission suggested a few points for reference which deserve our attention.

A pastoral plan for social communications should include the following elements:

- a) the statement of a vision, based on extensive consultation, which identifies communications strategies for all Church ministries and responds to contemporary issues and conditions.
- b) an inventory or assessment that describes the media environment in the territory under consideration, including audiences, public and commercial media producers and directors, financial and technical resources, delivery systems, ecumenical and educational resources, and Catholic media organizations and communications personnel, including those of religious communities.
- c) a proposed structure for Church-related social communications in support of evangelization, catechesis and education, social service, and ecumenical cooperation, and including, as far as possible, public relations, press, radio, television, cinema, cassettes, computer networks, facsimile services, and related forms of telecommunications.
- d) media education, with special emphasis on the relationship between media and values.

e) pastoral outreach to, and dialogue with, media professionals, with particular attention to their faith development and spiritual growth.

f) means of obtaining and maintaining financial support adequate to the carrying out of the pastoral plan (AN 24).

SCPF should work with everybody to act as a counterbalance force to the Internet ideology.

Conclusion: To Build Up a Cathopedia for the Universal Church and the World

According to Thussu, internet-based news media have also unleashed challenges about accuracy –both factual and contextual – given the speed and scale of information dissemination in the globalized communication environment. In the rush to be first with the news, mainstream news operators compete with digital news providers as well as non-state actors. Such connectivity has been misused by extremist groups, undermining journalism: *Time* magazine devoted a 2016 cover story to explaining “why we’re losing the Internet to the culture of hate.”⁶⁰

For Fuchs, however, it is paradoxical that more than 25 years after the end of development has intensified global problems and caused severe poverty and a rise of unequal income distribution. As a result, we have also seen a return of the economy in the form of a worldwide economic crisis and with it a re-actualization of the Marxian critique of capitalism. Although a persistent refrain is “Marx is dead, long live capitalism”, Marx has come back again today.⁶¹

Marx’s notion of a communist economy is what Crawford Macpherson (1973) and Carole Pateman (1970) describe as participatory democracy in the economic realm. Participatory democracy involves the intensification of democracy and its extensions into realms beyond politics. It also involves the insight that the capitalist economy is an undemocratic dictatorship of capital that should be democratized. Democracy is, in capitalism, limited to the realm of voting and parliament. Participatory democracy theory asks the questions of why democratic ideals are given up once one enters the realm of the workplace and how one can speak of a democratic society if the economy is excluded

⁶⁰ D. K. Thussu, *International Communication*, 242.

⁶¹ C. Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction* (2nd Ed.) (London: Sage, 2017), 319.

from the realm of democracy. It wants to go beyond a narrow understanding of the concept of democracy and broaden its meaning and practice.⁶²

To fight against the economic monopoly of media power, I would like to suggest the Catholic Church to run a social media platform based on the model of a “communist social media,” the Wikipedia. SCPF should seriously consider establishing a similar platform to share with all believers as well as non-believers the true concepts of Catholicism. I would like to suggest a name for it, which can be called “Cathopedia.”

To develop the Cathopedia, the Catholic Church can and should learn a lot from Wikipedia. According to Fuchs, the Wikipedia Foundation, which is a public, non-profit charity under US regulations, operates Wikipedia. Its self-defined purpose is to “empower and engage people around the world to collect and develop educational content under a free license or in the public domain, and to disseminate it effectively and globally.”⁶³

Surely, running a self-supported giant social media is never an easy thing. Paul Hodkinson reminds us that:

Crucial though it may be as a socio-cultural development, it is worth remembering that much of the content created and published by ordinary internet users will only be engaged with by tiny audiences. In spite of notable exceptions such as the peer-produced Wikipedia and occasional examples of user-generated content that go sufficiently viral to general significant interest, the most influential content still tends to originate with powerful organizations of one kind or another.⁶⁴

But Wikipedia tried hard to play a balance. According to Fuchs, Wikipedia’s products are collaboratively authored articles, which are available to the world without payment. Their character is dynamic and open. They are not a one-time product, but a product in flux that invites users to participate in developing the content, and therefore can potentially change according to the number of participants who become involved in its development.⁶⁵

Somebody may query that when there is a Wikipedia functioning well for so many years, why should we need another Cathopedia? My answer is that even the Wikipedia works

⁶² C. Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction* (2nd Ed.) (London: Sage, 2017), 321.

⁶³ C. Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*, 326.

⁶⁴ Paul Hodkinson, *Media Culture and Society, An Introduction* (2nd Ed.) (London: Sage, 2017), 190.

⁶⁵ C. Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*, 327.

hard to make each accurate and fair, there are always some insignificant but very harmful mistakes. Let me cite a current example to elaborate on this problem.

One of my good friends, Bp. Wu Junwei of Yuncheng (in Shanxi Province, China) just passed away on May 10, 2022.⁶⁶ In Wikipedia in the item named after Peter Wu Junwei, it writes “He (Wu Junwei) was ordained a priest by Zhang Xin (Chinese: 張信) on 9 December 1990.” In the Wikipedia (Wu Junwei Chinese), however, it reads,

1990年12月9日，武俊維在27歲時於太原聖母無染原罪主教座堂由太原總教區非法主教張信晉鐸。(English translation: On December 9, 1990, Wu Junwei was ordained a priest by the illicit Bishop Zhang Xin of the Taiyuan Archdiocese at the Our Lady of Immaculate Conception in Taiyuan City.)

In this Chinese version, Zhang Xin, unfortunately, was described as an “illicit bishop” which is very unfair to both Archbishop Zhang Xin and Bishop Wu Junwei. As far as we know, Archbishop Zhang Xin had been appointed by the Holy See as early as in 1980s. It needs the Church authority to clarify such above mistakes.

Therefore, regarding Church messages, we need to have the Catholic Church work on her own mechanism to guarantee that true information can be shared, and misunderstandings can be avoided.

The operation model of Wikipedia is very suitable for the Catholic Church. Regarding the editorial structure, Wikipedia provides a good practice model for the Catholic Church. It relies deeply upon volunteers who would like to contribute their efforts freely to maintain the truth.

According to Fuchs, in the period from 1 July 2013 until 30 June 2014, Wikipedia received donations of US\$49.6 million. Around 2.5 million supporters contributed donations. Wikipedia’s expenses are mainly funded by individual donations made by users. There is no advertising on Wikipedia and Wikipedia does not have a business model. Wikipedia’s terms of use and privacy policy therefore do not mention advertising – there is no need for commercial income.⁶⁷ Such expenses are completely acceptable to the Catholic Church. It is not difficult for the universal Catholic Church to mobilize millions of donors all over the world. And on average each donor for 20 US dollars is very acceptable to lay Catholics.

⁶⁶ “Bp. Wu. Junwei of Yuncheng Dead at 59,” *Sunday Examiner*, May 15, 2022, 3.

⁶⁷ C. Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*, 326.

The motto of Wikipedia is: “Imagine a world in which every single person on the planet is given free access to the sum of all human knowledge.” This shows that Wikipedia’s intrinsic reason for production is different from that of capitalism. Capitalism is based on profit interests, whereas Wikipedia is based on voluntary work and users’ desire and pleasure to work on the provision of encyclopedic knowledge as a common good that is available without payment to all.⁶⁸ Is it very similar to our zest to share the good news for human being with non-believers during the last two thousand years?

Somebody may ask: why Catholic groups do not organize their social media platform by themselves? Why are the lay Catholics still waiting for the Holy See to run a Cathopedia? My answer is that only the SCPF has such credibility to run this important platform for the Church. Individual Catholics can join them and work with them, but the leading role is still remanded to the Holy See Curia. The Holy See is always in the heart of Catholics.

【摘要】我們的主耶穌基督命令祂的門徒（以及後來的我們）將福音喜訊傳給世上所有民族。因此我們可以說，基督教會從一開始就肩負著向所有人傳播的使命。教會可被視為最早建立的機構之一，主要作為一個傳播機構。傳信部 1622 年成立時，教會打算將自己裝備成一個更專業的傳播機構，以滿足與新世界相關的新傳播模式的需要。在社交媒體風靡全球的二十一世紀，教會成員不能避免地要研究社交媒體在人類傳播史上的影響和優缺點等重要議題。這也是本論文的主要方向。對於傳播學的研究，政治和媒體意識形態是大眾傳播學者不會忽視的重要議題。因此，對社交媒體的研究將合理地引導我們討論這樣一個問題：社交媒體在政治和媒體意識形態背景下扮演什麼角色？關於媒體意識形態，我想引用兩種重要的思潮來加強討論：一是馬克思主義學者對媒介意識形態的挑戰，二是天主教社會訓導對媒介意識形態的挑戰。當我們區分「宣揚好消息」和「傳播假新聞」時，我們有必要致力於改變「宣傳」(propaganda) 一詞的概念，至少從 1622 年到二次大戰後的新時代，天主教界一直珍視這個詞。我將詳細闡述為什麼天主教會最終將名稱從「傳信部」改為「萬民福音傳播部」。透過上述討論，我希望針對以下問題提出一定的建議：天主教會在數碼年代的角色是什麼？我們可以做些什麼來

⁶⁸ C. Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*, 327.

透過大眾媒體增進真正的理解？我們可以做些什麼來透過社群媒體增進真正的理解？我們可以做些什麼來透過人與人之間的交流來增進真正的理解？

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