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Three Basic Dimensions of Manipulative Message

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Abstract

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This study aims to clarify the role, place and dimensions of message in persuasive manipulation action. Used method is one of meta-analytic type. Main results of the research consist of revealing planned character of the message provided in the manipulation and highlighting the main aspects of manipulative message. It appears that in the action of manipulation, planned, well thought out, well structured, sequential and phased messages are always performed. In the centre of manipulative message targets and actants of manipulation (those that act on targets) are situated. As original scientific contribution, there emphasized three basic dimensions of manipulative message: self-securing coordinate (conspiracy of the sources and targets), informational dimension (fragmentation and distortion of information) and psychological dimension (sensitising the target to the manipulative message).

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Keywords: Manipulation; planned message; self-securing coordinate of the message; informational dimension of the message; psychological dimension of the message.

1. Self-securing coordinate

Within the situation of manipulation, the manipulative message is triggered. This message has a self-securing coordinate as main coordinate. One of the important purposes of the message is to valorise and cover the situation of manipulation. The message undertaking also has as objectives the conspiracy of the sources and targets by creating ambiguity concerning them and by multiplying the potential targets and sources. “Manipulator’s force, shows Alex Mucchielli, lies in not being unmasked, in doing the task covered in anonymat” (Mucchielli, 2002). The message shall accumulate aspects which would lead the dissuasion analyst to sets of possible tracks which they cannot decisively opt between and by means of which one could secure the source and interests of the intervention of influence. The manipulative message must be developed so it can be qualified as anything else including as propaganda or disinformation, as a lie or rumour. The perfect manipulative message is that message which cannot be qualified as manipulation by the targets or consumers of manipulation. This message allows to be classified as any other form of persuasion, but not as manipulation. Above all, the manipulative message secures manipulation. The information included into the manipulative message is assigned to a source only when there is no more an emergency exit, on the same coordinate of coverage (Cathala, 1986; Volkoff, 2004; Brănzan, 2012). In these cases, they are assigned to a “trustworthy” source. Generally, the messages do not have a source. When it is imposed to fall under the incidence of a source, then the information is modelled so that it would bear the obvious “mark” of a neutral source which the manipulated usually trusts. Another type of masking which it is used consists in advancing basically non-secret information as if they were secret under the procedure of disclosing some confidential information.

2. Informational dimension

Besides its self-protective and counter-informative dimension, the manipulative message has an informational dimension. On this coordinate, the manipulative message always starts from a real, authentic and veritable fact. Notoriousness brings the fact to the state of informational “minimality”. The primordial fact in the manipulative message is a notoriety fact or an unknown fact, but minor and easily verifiable. The fact which manipulation starts from can may be ultimately reduced to a minor fact. Factoids articulate (by persuasive operations) on the elements of this fact (Vlăduțescu, 2013). The manipulative message is characterised not by facts, but by factoids. It seduces by “factoids”, it lies by factoids. The minor fact results from the reduction of some information. The revealing aspects of information hide therein, those aspects which would harm the manipulative intervention if the manipulated knew about them (Durandin, 1993; Pergnier, 2004). To compensate and to keep the veracity appearances, which are elided in the idea of making room for implementing the manipulation is replaced with unnecessary details about that minor fact. The manipulative speech additionally uses the “concealment” of some important aspects in the edifice of authentic information, either by deliberate elimination, or by updating the information in delay, which distorts the information and reduces its effectiveness.

By reducing the basic authentic information to a minor working fact, the following is achieved:

a) a fragmentation of the information and presentation of only what is convenient to the manipulator;

b) a distortion of the basic topic and its dispersion into distorting explanations.

The minor fact is related to unverifiable and yet incontestable deeds, presented as authentic. Lies and distorted information are added therein, which would benefit by inertia from the incontestability of what is unverifiable (Watzlawick, 1977; Ferro, 1991; Negrea, 2013). The speech also draws into collaboration suggestions in relation to the deeds, so that the influences triggered to lead to conclusions useful in the ratiocination of the manipulative project. Suggestion, as form of pseudo-information may be accompanied by para-information and over-information.

In under-information, so many information is brought into the instance of cogitatively processing, so that by working at the limit with the processing capacities, the critical analysis would be rendered hostile (Schedler, 2002). On the other hand, to relieve the manipulative cogitative resources allocated in processing over-information, it can be follow to a self-criticism by means of which it is reduced of the information that would have aroused suspicions of persuasion and by means of which the impression of objectivity s enhanced.

3. Psychological dimension

The psychological dimension of manipulative discourse focuses on psychologically sensitising the target to the manipulative message. The basis of the subject's permeability enhancement intervention to the „instructions” of the message is to know the target individual's personality or the psychodynamic characteristics of the target-group or target-community. Depending on knowing the target, the speech shall focus on creating, maintaining and consolidating a trusty atmosphere which would allow the implantation of the manipulative action (MacKenzie, 1984; McCornack, 1992). The central measure of installing the trusty atmosphere shall be the unconcealed convergence in an original agreement. As any protocol or contract, the original agreement shall exploit all that directly means and obviously “WE”; “we smoke”, “we do not smoke”, “we do not drink coffee”, “we support the team”, etc. This original agreement operates as a platform for “captatio benevolentiae” for the interlocutor and as a favourable framework for launching the manipulative ideas. For and on the notable account of the initial agreement the prior views of the target-audience shall be accepted. The original agreement is therefore held in a salutary manner by the acceptance of the message recipients' opinions. The reality is that the target-audience does not have clear views. People have some attitude. Their views rise on this attitude (Edmond, 2013). The „target opinions” are partly invented by that who manipulatively evokes them first, to set them forth and, secondly, to set forth the terms of an agreement that shall progressively amended. Beyond the acceptance of the opinions, the content of the agreement is reinforced by the community demanding attitude, conduct, behaviour, interests and values. In the original agreement, the manipulator tends to identify themselves with the manipulated, to show they have something in common with the manipulated (Pitriciu & Topală, 2011). The identifying agreement has two parties: a positive one and a negative one.

The positive part is positive identification: we have the same opinions, attitudes, motives, interests, values, etc. The negative part is negative identification: we oppose together to some „wrong” opinions,

we fight together an attitude, a mentality, we think better than others, behave more correctly than others, we have other goals than the opponents, etc. The manipulative keywords of the original agreement, those that shall become the slogan of manipulative relationship shall be: „together”, „one and all”, „close”, „shoulder to shoulder”, „arm to arm” etc.

If the lie is part of the arsenal of informational manipulative means, seduction occupies the princely place in the psycho-manipulative “organon”. A sympathy played to the target-audience is attached to “together”. Sympathy is reinforced by assigning support and assistance (Dumitru et. al., 2015; McCornack et. al., 2014; Budică & Dumitru-Traistaru, 2015). The manipulative relation is supported by blandishment, adulation, flattery, cajolement. Subsequently, promises and engagements are added to the original agreement, which shall be primers for triggering the target into the manipulative project.

Another widely used psychological means is the appeal to the opinions of some authorities which would approve the scenario where the source and the target have beneficial roles (Cheney & Seyfarth, 1985). The target and the source as “we” should therefore not “disappoint”, frustrate the authority’s expectations.

4. Two classic examples

Above and before all, manipulative media persuasion goes towards opinion. Among the procedures used in this sense, J. P. Duvignaud and G. Namer lists some techniques which are linking with collective memory: disseminating the information selectively, their truncation, change in the context to anaesthetise the information; combining the authentic information with minor information, which is unrelated to its topic, able lead to disqualification; stressing the secondary damage in the prejudice of the essential one; proliferating false news, coordinated with favouring some slowing down of refute; discredibly commenting on an information (Duvignaud & Namer, 1987).

On the informational coordinate of the manipulative message the so-called technical manipulation procedures (Smarandache & Vlăduțescu, 2014) are also classified: analogue photo and video manipulations, digital photo and video manipulations, manipulations of the databases etc.

In recent history, a manipulation is given as an example where the informational plan has been vitiated by technical procedures: „Shooting the South Korean civilian airliner by the Soviets.” Alvin A. Snyder (1997), former manager of the C.I.A. during the presidency of Ronald Reagan, has declared that at the time of the event materials, data and information have been made available to him and was required to make a film about the shooting of the airliner. The film was presented at the United Nations and depicted how illegally and inhumanly the fighter aircrafts shot a South-Korean civilian airliner, lost in the airspace of the U.S.R.R. The film contributed in condemning the action by the United Nations Security Council. Alternatively, by means of the set of materials supplied, it was sought to exploit the incident with the intention of discrediting the Soviets and their furious campaign against the deployment of NATO missiles in Europe. After making the film, A. Snyder came into the possession of a rich material which allowed him to conclude that, before shooting straight at it, the pilot of the Soviet fighter aircraft fired warning shots and several times it swung the wings of the aircraft, according to the international usages, as a sign of forcing the civilian airliner to descend and land. These signals did not receive any response. When mounting the film, Snyder found out and was made available just a

selection of images held, which forced him to conclude that the Soviets had been of bad faith. When the entire videotape was made available to him, he could observe that the film had triggered a manipulation of planet zero level, the technical procedures of montage had proved their manipulative efficiency (Snyder, 1997).

In the information age, a hacker's manipulation of the listings of credit cards, financial data or other data on a cracked server may have one of the most undesirable consequences. The information age brings satellites, cell-phones, satellite TV, the Internet and other means of communication, exposed to technical manipulation. Computers and chips become a battlefield. The computer networks are true theatres of war where viruses, electronic battle devices and electromagnetic impulses manipulate the information. The circuits of the information are endangered to be manipulated. Manipulation by technical procedures becomes a threat. Another example of officially recognised manipulation is some events of the war triggered on 24 March 1999 against Yugoslavia (Plante & Bierbauer, 1999; Bierbauer, 2011; Johnson & Meyeraan, 2003; www.cnn.com). As a way of persuasive influence, manipulation reigned in Kosovo. The U.S. military leadership applied there, rough manipulation methods, controlling the Internet in an electronic warfare against the press. The communications were monitored and it has even been manipulatively intervened also on commercial satellites. Officials of the U.S. Army declared they would have liked some of the information about the war to have been covered better: bombardment of the television in Belgrade and bombardment of the Chinese Embassy in the Yugoslav capital. After the war ended, it was surfaced that the CNN had a close cooperation with strategies of the psychological office of the U.S. Army. Some news of CNN wear purely "military", created and produced by strategies in manipulation. The statistics proved that CNN played the military specialists' game. During the first two weeks of fights in Kosovo, the TV station based in Atlanta (USA) "made" around 30 articles which were released on the Internet. The manipulative vocabulary was obvious: „refugees”, „expulsions”, „mass murders”, „mass graves”. These words are frequently used in the set of articles. The „Kosovo Liberation Army” appears incidental, and nothing is mentioned about the Serb civilians killed by Albanian forces. The set has a message which is polarised strictly around a central topic. When it is a matter about dealing with the reality by such a grid, simplifications and omissions intervene automatically: the principle to generate manipulation has been thus put into service.

Undoubtedly, the media is also on their negative side the tools of mass manipulation. The press, shows Robert Cirino (1971) is one of the „most active manipulation systems” and the main techniques used are choice of events, selection of news according to manipulative criteria, placing the news (priority, place, page etc.), influence by headlines, selection of photographs, the editorial, production and dissemination of tendentious information (Cotelea, 2007; Jung, 2009). Can journalism be located outside the sometimes negative interests of the state which makes possible its existence?

5. Conclusion

Manipulation can be prevented, neutralised and combated. In this respect, the system of dissuasion shall first guide to the targets of manipulation and shall take into account how they have been or are affected. Dissuasion shall emphasise the manipulator's purposes and objectives, as well as the means of

achieving the manipulative intervention. Subsequently, propagation of manipulation shall be neutralised, and the anti-manipulation operators shall combat the effects and shall reverberations shall completely destroy manipulation.

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