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MANIPULATION OF MASS CONSCIOUSNESS AS A PHENOMENON OF THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

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Abstract

Manipulating people's minds is one of the most serious and widely discussed problems of our time. This is because in today's information civilization, the phenomenon of manipulation of mass consciousness through information technology has taken on a total character. The information society forms a global information space providing free access to information resources and making the life of modern man much easier. At the same time, there are negative trends related to the social conflict between producers and consumers of information. Influenced by social, political, economic and cultural factors, this conflict leads to an increasing role for manipulation of mass consciousness and creates the preconditions for a media reality that makes it difficult to adequately reflect reality. Due to the increasing technological possibilities of manipulation, the rate of manipulative influence of information on the mass consciousness in the information society is increasing, which generates the problem of information security of the individual and society proved that at the present stage it is possible to view the process of manipulation of mass consciousness as a system of psychological influence aimed at planting an illusory worldview. Manipulation as a form of covert influence on consciousness, relates to the lack of free will of the individual and his own decision-making. The results of the study focus on an in-depth scientific analysis of socio-cultural processes in the context of the global informatization of modern society.

Keywords: Information, information society, manipulation, mass communication

1. Introduction

The creation and improvement of information technology leads to an intense flow of information. The information environment creates the conditions for manipulation of the mass consciousness, which can lead to a distorted view of the world and result in people acting in unpredictable ways. This can be a threat to public safety and the self-preservation of society as a whole.

Society is permeated by a whole network of different information channels and communication systems, saturated with its own information industry. Politics, production and energy, finance, science and education, media – all depend on the intensity of information exchange, completeness, timeliness, reliability of information. Human aspiration to possess information as a measure for organizing the surrounding world and eliminating uncertainty of knowledge about the world arises from his subconscious desire, not only to survive, to carry out all inherent processes of life, but also to raise his social, material status, to enrich himself spiritually and culturally, to acquire new knowledge. At the same time, the increasing role of the information component in communication processes has led to an increase in the role of manipulative techniques.

In the information space, the manipulation of the consciousness of the masses proceeds through the control of information and communication media, which determine the rules and stereotypes of human behaviour and activity and serve as the main means of manipulation. As a covert influence on the mass consciousness, manipulation usually aims to create inertia in the masses. This results in an increase of negative tendencies related to the formation of stereotypes in the mass consciousness, a change in values and lifestyle.

2. Problem Statement

This article explores the problem of mass consciousness manipulation in the context of the global informatization of society. The main problem involves solving the following tasks: to characterize manipulation as a type of psychological influence on the consciousness of an individual and consider the main theoretical approaches to the study of this phenomenon; to identify the role of information and modern mass communication media as manipulators of mass consciousness; to consider mechanisms of manipulation of public consciousness; to show that in modern Russian conditions there is also a problem of communication manipulation both by society as a whole and by individual social.

3. Research Questions

Reveal the essence of manipulation and its main characteristics. Examine the role of information and communication technology in manipulating mass consciousness. Identify the specifics of manipulation of mass consciousness in the Russian socio-cultural space.

3.1. The essence of manipulation and its main characteristics

The concept of 'manipulation' is at the heart of contemporary socio-humanitarian knowledge. So, Bessonov understands manipulation as a form of spiritual influence, covert domination implemented by

violent means, control over a person's inner world, his spirituality (Bessonov, 2008). The researcher assumes that manipulative actions can emerge only in a developed society, where people find it difficult to adapt to social realities and need to incorporate into social life and obey its rules. The implementation of these processes is impossible without manipulation.

Most scholars agree that manipulation is necessary for the existence of society, thus demonstrating a positive attitude towards manipulation. For example, Ortega y Gasset (2005) noted that society can be divided into the masses, who have no opinion of their own, and a select few. "Mass is mediocre... Today the entire world has become a mass" (p. 11). Since, according to the philosopher, the masses are unable to think theoretically, they lack the capacity to adequately perceive reality. As such, it is necessary to entrust the shaping of public opinion to leaders who can manipulate the emotions and behaviour of the masses, thereby preventing anarchy in the state.

Dotsenko sees manipulation as 'psychological influence aimed at changing the direction of another person's activity' (2003).

There are certain personality traits that are most vulnerable to manipulation: underdeveloped logical thinking, sensitivity, low mental alertness, heightened emotionality, indecisiveness, lack of self-esteem, feelings of inferiority, shyness, trustfulness. It is difficult to influence a confident person, able to stand up for themselves and has a formed view of the surrounding reality (Goncharov, 2015).

A key feature of the phenomenon of manipulation is its covert nature. The ultimate goal of the manipulator includes: to gain a one-sided advantage; to form a specific attitude towards the object to achieve their own ends; and to mislead the addressee as to the nature of the information presented to them. As a result, the attitude of the object of manipulation towards reality makes it possible to control mass consciousness in the way desired by the manipulator.

Manipulation is a phenomenon that has occurred at different stages of the social development process. Even in ancient China, the manipulative approach was incorporated into the art of secretly controlling the enemy. The art has been handed down from generation to generation and has been carefully concealed. The advice of the ancient Chinese general and strategist Sun Tzu, the founder of the school of military philosophy, to government officials was that the enemy should be misled by various tricks and then attacked (Sun, 2011). The phenomenon of manipulation was theorised in the writings of Machiavelli. The author believed that maintaining a strong state required manipulative policies to help keep the self-interest of citizens in balance. Throughout the history of social development, there has been a constant evolution in the techniques and methods of manipulation.

Modern science holds the view that manipulation is a phenomenon that has no history and reflects only the characteristics of our time. When considering the position of manipulation in modern society, Lanina believes that any democratic state has only de jure principles of respect for human rights; de facto, there is a systematic and legitimate violation of them. According to the scholar, the reason for this is competitive rivalry pursued by covert methods and related to the desire to gain unilateral advantage, usually harming the opposing side. This pattern is common in most social practices (Lanina, 2010).

The informatization of society not only gives people free access to information, but also increases the negative tendencies associated with changes in values and lifestyles and the increasing manipulation of mass consciousness.

3.2. Information and communication technology as a means of manipulating mass consciousness

In the information society context, the main value is information, which Luhmann (2017) defines as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that needs to be considered from different scientific perspectives. The scholar offers his own interpretation of information, noting that information is a form that presupposes a certain structure involving its own elements, i.e. events. Events have a temporal characteristic, past events do not disappear, they merely transform the content of the structure: "time itself forces the distinction between meaning and information, although all reproduction of meaning is through information". (p. 72).

Many different communication technologies are emerging in the information society and serving as transmitters of information. One type of communicative interaction is known as transactional media communication. Transactional media communication involves an interpersonal communication relationship that allows each party to act simultaneously as a sender, receiver or transmitter of information.

We can divide all communicative situations where mass consciousness is subject to information-psychological influence into three groups. The first group includes such communicative conditions that involve not only direct interaction and direct exchange of information, but also the indirect one through telephone, post, telegraph, Internet.

The second group encompasses the communication sphere, where the mass consciousness is subject to informational and psychological influences from a single communicator or group of communicators. Public events (rallies, meetings, shows) involve one-way communication, which is carried out according to the scheme: "communicator – audience".

The third group includes a set of communicative situations characterized by a direct informational impact on the mass consciousness. This comes from watching TV programmes, reading the press, and interacting with various mass media.

In these situations, mass consciousness is influenced from the simple (first group) to the complex (third group). It is important to note that the informational impact on consciousness through media is the best way to manipulate the mass consciousness because the individual in this situation does not quite feel the direct influence of the media. The main characteristic of the information age is the inclusiveness and omnipresence of modern mass media. Schiller believes that the information society best meets the needs of developed capitalism. Information is the means through which people enter the sphere of consumption, considering it to be the main mode of existence in society (Schiller, 1980). In considering information culture as a culture of signs, Baudrillard (2000) noted that information technology provides the consumer with a lot of information that interprets facts and turns them into a kind of signs-simulacra. The excess of information causes a kind of 'bifurcation' in human consciousness, as a person is unable to adequately absorb all the information. Individuals become impersonal masses who, according to Baudrillard, constitute a silent majority, a faceless crowd led by movers and shakers. This situation is an ideal environment for manipulation.

Webster, analysing the causes of manipulative actions in modern society, points to the struggle between different powerful groups pursuing their own interests and seeking to strengthen their position.

The leaders of these groups seek to present their personal 'narrow' interests to the individual as interests allegedly in the interests of the masses. Thus, the apparatus of 'managed mass creation' does not pursue humanistic goals and ideas, but its own hidden interests (Webster, 2004).

3.3. Specific features of manipulation of mass consciousness in the Russian socio-cultural space

The current state of cultural and social processes in Russia is marked by the enormous influence of information culture. Public relations practitioners use a variety of PR techniques in their work, directly or indirectly influencing the public consciousness. The analysis of image communication techniques presented in the literature suggests the following signs of manipulation: substitution of concepts, uncontrolled source of information, use of emotions instead of arguments, focus on fast-moving subjects, lack of alternatives to opinions, etc.

In this context, the problem of communication manipulation, both by society as a whole and by individual social groups and individuals, has become particularly relevant for Russian studies. PR is one of the most important tools for organizing social relations, a method for constructing social reality, and has an important place in culture. There are a number of psychological defence mechanisms to limit manipulative influence on a person, including:

- the time-lag effect where an unpopular idea is a strong irritant;
- the sleeping person effect where information is forgotten faster than the source;
- the boomerang effect is the opposite result;
- the privatization effect whereby the stronger the flow of information, the less responsive it is (Bulgakova et al., 2018).

Methods of manipulation have long been widespread in different cultures. In Russian society, they are largely related to national, socio-cultural norms and mentality. Mentality can inhibit or facilitate the spread of manipulation. A specific feature of manipulative influence is its covert, hidden nature to the addressee. It is managing people by imposing ideas, attitudes, motives, stereotypes of behaviour to the advantage of the manipulator. A number of advantages the manipulator has over the addressee determine the effectiveness of manipulative influence.

Thus, manipulation generates a situation when there is an external purpose to the communication and no open explanation of it for all participants in the communication. It is a tool of psychological influence that aims to change the direction of other people's activity, leading to the covert arousal of another person's intentions that do not coincide with their existing desires.

4. Purpose of the Study

Based on this review of the subject field and the objectives of the article, the aim is to investigate the main characteristics of manipulation of mass consciousness in the global informatization of modern society.

5.   Research Methods

The methodological basis for this study was the fundamental teachings presented in the works of domestic and foreign scholars in the field of information society and information culture, mass consciousness and mass communication. We have used the work of Moscovici (2006) and Dotsenko (2003) to explore the specificities of the process of manipulating mass consciousness. The works of (Bulgakova et al., 2018; Bryant & Thompson, 2004; Chumikov, 2008; Lanina, 2010; Markov, 2005) have played an important role in studying the role of mass communications in the process of manipulating influence on personality. Their writings present various aspects of shaping public opinion and the purposeful influence of information on the mass consciousness to achieve specific goals in social, cultural and political relations. Modern researchers have contributed greatly to developing the doctrine of manipulation of mass consciousness. So, Vojtasik pays special attention to the problems of propaganda and the nature and functions of propaganda processes (Wojtasik, 1981). Noel-Neumann has analysed the relationship between mass communication, interpersonal communication and how individuals relate their opinions to those of others (Noel-Neumann, 2006). The above works help to reveal the multifaceted nature of the process of manipulating mass consciousness, its specific features and mechanisms of functioning.

While analysing the characteristics of manipulation of mass consciousness, we used a wide range of methodological tools. The basis of the research is the philosophical approach used to study social phenomena. The historical method allowed considering the phenomenon of manipulation in evolution. The comparative method enabled the comparison of similar processes from different periods, forms and methods of media influence on public consciousness, as well as the views of different domestic and foreign philosophers. This article is a comprehensive analysis of the problem of manipulation of consciousness, so it uses both methods of philosophical science and data from cultural, political and sociological research.

6.   Findings

Based on our research into the characteristics of manipulation of mass consciousness in the information society, we arrive at the following results.

1. The emergence of the information society is leading to an increase in the volume of information disseminated and in the complexity of the content of the social information environment. The means of transmission, form and content of incoming information have enormous potential for direct and covert (manipulative) influence on people's consciousness.

2. Throughout the history of society, manipulation of mass consciousness has been an important factor in social management, but it is particularly valuable to study the phenomenon of manipulation nowadays, with the emergence of the information society.

3. Manipulation of mass consciousness is the covert influence of the media on human consciousness. Its purpose is to change the values of individuals and groups to control their behaviour and manage their activities.

4. Modern mass communication has enormous power to influence the consciousness of the masses. Everyone can protect themselves from manipulative influences to a large extent. The positive effect will depend on the individual: the level of education, the development of critical thinking, and the desire to make sense of things seen.

5. In today's context of Russian adaptation to globalization and informatization, the phenomenon of manipulation requires more than ever a productive scientific understanding. Knowing the techniques, methods and ways of manipulating the mass consciousness that have been used since antiquity will undoubtedly help us to navigate better in today's information environment.

6. The pace of the manipulative influence of information on public consciousness and the individual in the information society is inevitably increasing, which makes it important to investigate the manipulative potential of the information environment and the means of information transmission, especially through media communication.

7. Conclusion

The analysis of the manipulation of mass consciousness in the information society has shown the importance and necessity of studying the issue. The study points out that the information society, as a complex, self-organising socio-cultural system, besides positive trends, also brings negative ones into the life of social actors. The influence of information technology on society and the formation of a media reality that substitutes objective reality have expanded the possibilities for manipulating the mass consciousness. This became possible because the main driver of human and social development was the production of an information product rather than a material product, and the role of information in the material product itself had increased. In today's society, the information environment has a manipulative effect on the mass consciousness. At the macro level, mass communication media are responsible for the dissemination of information within the information environment and form a special kind of secondary reality, relating to objective reality, – the 'media reality'. The informational impact of media-reality on people's consciousness, thinking, feelings and emotional sphere is no less than that of objective reality. Using techniques of socio-psychological manipulation, the mass media form elements of the media reality of the regional information environment of individual states. The media picture of the world is a product of manipulating the public psychology of mass audiences by the media which substitutes objective reality and makes it difficult to cognize adequately. The main reason for the formation of media reality lies in the fact that part of the media is deliberately created at the behest of various influential stakeholders to manipulate the mass consciousness. Scholars agree that manipulation of mass consciousness cannot be the norm, but is instead evidence of a social shift "away from the idea of an informed and rational society towards manipulation and public relations techniques" (Rice & Rice, 2014).

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