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TEACHING HUMAN BEHAVIOUR WITH THE CASE OF MANIPULATIVE IMPACT OF MEDIA RESOURCES ON AN AUDIENCE UNDER PANDEMIC CONDITIONS

ENSEÑAR EL COMPORTAMIENTO HUMANO CON EL CASO DE IMPACTO MANIPULATIVO DE LOS RECURSOS MEDIÁTICOS EN UNA AUDIENCIA EN CONDICIONES PANDÉMICAS

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the teaching method of analysing human response with the case of the technologies of origin of fake news in the Internet space and the methods of its dissemination in the media in pandemic conditions by the example of the regional media activities in the Republic of Tatarstan, being the constituent entity of the Russian Federation which is one of the most saturated with media resources. Today interest in the problem of manipulative influence of media resources on their audience is growing more and more. It is the media field that is capable of shaping the basic news agenda, cutting off “inconvenient” information, and disseminating opinions supported by an “all-knowing expert”. Purposeful informational influence leads to the fact that a person easily perceives new ideas and considers suggested opinions as his/her own thoughts. The main purpose of manipulation is skillfully hidden; it should not be discovered even if the attempts at manipulation are exposed. In today's difficult situation, when a pandemic is taking place in the world, various sources of information are engaged in spreading false news that can become dangerous for part of society. Such information appears more and more often against the background of general panic; and people pay attention to it, because the main topic of such news is health and death.

Keywords:

Manipulation, teaching the media resource, impact, audience, social networks.

RESUMEN

Este artículo examina el método de enseñanza de analizar la respuesta humana con el caso de las tecnologías de origen de las noticias falsas en el espacio de Internet y los métodos de su difusión en los medios en condiciones de pandemia a través del ejemplo de las actividades mediáticas regionales en la República de Tartaristán, siendo la entidad constituyente de la Federación de Rusia, que es una de las más saturadas de recursos mediáticos. En la actualidad, el interés por el problema de la influencia manipuladora de los recursos de los medios sobre su audiencia está creciendo cada vez más. Es el campo de los medios de comunicación el que es capaz de dar forma a la agenda informativa básica, cortar información “inconveniente” y difundir opiniones respaldadas por un “experto omnisciente”. La influencia informativa intencionada conduce al hecho de que una persona percibe fácilmente nuevas ideas y considera las opiniones sugeridas como sus propios pensamientos. El objetivo principal de la manipulación se oculta hábilmente; no debe descubrirse incluso si se exponen los intentos de manipulación. En la difícil situación actual, cuando se está produciendo una pandemia en el mundo, diversas fuentes de información se dedican a difundir noticias falsas que pueden volverse peligrosas para parte de la sociedad. Esta información aparece cada vez más a menudo en un contexto de pánico generalizado; y la gente le presta atención, porque el tema principal de tales noticias es la salud y la muerte.

Palabras clave:

Manipulación, enseñanza del recurso mediático, impacto, audiencia, redes sociales.

INTRODUCTION

Manipulating information is one of the most effective methods of shaping public opinion. At the same time, various methods of influencing human consciousness are actively used. Manipulations can be successful only if a person does not notice that he/she is being manipulated, since the influence occurs at the level of the psyche. And for this, manipulation must be covert, so that neither individuals nor society as a whole could notice the purposeful influence. The task of manipulation is the deprivation of the possibility of free choice, the establishment of control over behaviour, and coercion into certain actions.

The most effective means of manipulative influence today are the media space and social networks. Manipulation in this case is based on differentiating the information space into segments, emphasizing information flows on any specific objects (by territorial, nationality, by belonging to a particular social group, etc.). Taking this into account, the “necessary” information flows are formed; control and adjustment are carried out.

In our paper, we tried to analyse the specifics of the use of manipulative technologies by Russian media resources in the context of the coronavirus pandemic. It was during the pandemic that an explosive growth in the media audience was observed, primarily due to the fact that many people spent more time at home due to self-isolation, and began to show interest in everything related to events related to the coronavirus: an increase in the number of infected people, imposed restrictions (cancellation of mass events, closure of shops and shopping centres, transition to distance learning), government measures for social protection of the population, etc. This situation has a two-fold effect on the activity of media resources: on the one hand, the inflow of users to websites and to social networks has increased; and on the other hand, the flow of unverified information has increased. In these conditions, the media have become one of the main manipulative tools.

METHODOLOGY

Many researchers are engaged in the problem of manipulating the mass consciousness. In recent years, a fairly large number of studies on this topic have appeared. In his monographic work, Kara-Murza (2000), investigates the basic signs and symptoms of manipulation. Interesting methodological approaches to the classification of ways and methods of manipulation can be found in the works of O'Donnell & Jowett (1992); Adelstein (1997); Dotsenko (1997); Lull (2000); Chomsky (2002); Dzyaloshinskiy (2006); Van Dijk (2006); Gazizov (2009); Druzhinin (2017).

DEVELOPMENT

As we know, manipulation is a hidden action. In this case, the manipulated object should not detect it. In his monographic work, Kara-Murza (2000), points to a number of basic signs and symptoms of manipulation. They include a peculiar language and expressive presentation of information, operational and sensational nature of information, repeated repetition, dividing basic information into small components, removing the “most valuable” facts from the context, the totalitarian nature of the information source, mixing assessments and the information itself manipulation (Kara-Murza, 2000). Attempts to mask manipulative information by an expert or authority, decoherent quotes, and reinforcement of stereotypes are also characteristic to manipulation.

As an initial action, a strong stream of objective information is created. At the same time, it is given without any systematization. Then the audience's reaction to specific information blocks is monitored, what makes it possible to adjust the agenda. Methods such as rearrangement, involvement of authorities, and paralipsis are used. Reality is reflected in a falsified form according to the results of secondary control: only the necessary quotes, statistics, and sociological data are selected. All this is built in the right way, supplemented with visual elements, enhanced by linguistic means of emotional expressiveness.

The most widely used method of manipulating public opinion is the creation of stereotypes. This method is based on instilling certain images in people in relation to current events and phenomena in the life of society, in relation to certain social strata and groups and individuals. Such methods are often used by media resources, especially during periods of election campaigns. In this case, the imposed image of a leader of social and political life serves as a classic stereotype. The image of a politician is made the way the voters want him to be. That is, the formation of an image is carried out in accordance with the “request” of society and the expectations of people, rather than the objective reality are in the foreground (Dzyaloshinskiy, 2006).

In a situation where people become vulnerable to an incomprehensible situation or event, they begin to believe in all the information that is offered to them or is easily available. Very often people do not even try to analyse this information due to the large flood of news. People simply have little time to check and analyse information received from outside. Therefore, most manipulative news is aimed at a mass audience ready to assimilate any proposed content. If such information has a flashy title or an interesting visual

sequence, then the likelihood of memorizing the text is even more increased.

The mass audience is interested in those topics that are aimed at the private life of public people, at unhealthy interpersonal relationships, at health problems, at sensations. At the same time, the audience pays attention to the bright headlines, simultaneously memorizing the essence of the information. By preferring these topics for daily reading, the mass audience creates a great potential for manipulation by the media.

Since mid-March 2020, the information agenda in Russia, as well as in the regions of the country has been captured by the topic of the spread of a new coronavirus infection. The situation changed almost every day, and as a result, the audience's interest in news increased. For example, according to the Yandex service "WordStat", in March 2020, residents of the Republic of Tatarstan typed the query "Novosti" into the search system 1,059,842 times, while in the same period last year it was 274,444 times. According to the service, in April residents of Tatarstan typed into the search engine the query "coronavirus" 3,101,222 times, and already in May it was 1,981,794 times. This is due to the weakening of restrictive measures and the lifting of the self-isolation regime (Internet service Yandex. Selection of words", 2020).

With the advent of the pandemic, the media environment in the Russian media has changed. There was too much information on the unknown virus, and it is almost impossible to verify its reliability and validity. A large niche in the media space was occupied by media events related to statistics on morbidity. It is impossible to find out whether the formed media events are real, since the event was taken from the data of the operational headquarters created by the Russian government.

We also noted a wave of fake media events, which were formed on the basis of various statements and unverified figures created according to the principle "as reported by the media outlet's own source." The general media picture was more like a mass hysteria. The content became entirely composed of media events related to the coronavirus pandemic.

A manipulative approach to the audience is primarily based on the fact that a reader has familiarized with the information and considers it the most correct. In fact, this information is false, but thanks to manipulative technologies, the audience will not understand that they have been deceived. For example, this is how various myths related to health in a pandemic emerged. The most famous myth was spread about vitamin C, about the benefits of which many publications wrote. This information is still popular.

The reason for this is the competent manipulation on the topic of health, since people are used to believing in the benefit of "folk" remedies for colds, and readily available pharmaceuticals. Manipulation in this case serves the interests of pharmaceutical companies.

Fake messages related to methods of treating a viral disease began to appear on the Internet. It has become popular on social networks to send short videos or text notes with headlines about the benefits of folk remedies: "The folk remedy protects against the coronavirus," "The best medicine that was hidden from us," "Buy it at the pharmacy! This is a tool that kills any virus." People begin to believe that lemon and ginger really help in the fight against disease through such publications. Due to the active distribution of such fakes, lemon and ginger were bought from stores, as a result of which these products have risen in price at times.

Certain media resources distribute false information that can become fatal for some people. For example, in Iran, a large number of people died due to the false news about the methods of treatment for COVID-19 (In Iran, more than 300 people died from alcohol treatment, 2020). The fake news contained information that alcohol helps to cope with the disease. As a result, several hundred people died from methyl alcohol poisoning. In a pandemic, such news appears more and more often. The audience tends to believe in any information against the background of such a panic, as people need to calm their nerves and feel safe. The creators of manipulative information perfectly understand this need for a mass audience and come up with new forms and methods to intimidate the audience, while controlling its consciousness.

Many media resources published false figures about the spread of the virus using overstated statistics on the number of infected and dead people, "secret documents" on the imposition of a curfew or quarantine in a particular city. Operating with inaccurate data, the authors of such materials publish them for the sake of a joke or deliberately try to cause panic and fear among Internet users. However, thanks to the effective work of law enforcement agencies, the situation was resolved.

It is possible to purchase false publication material for a small amount on some sites. In this situation, it is frightening that such publications can be bought and posted on the networks by anyone. In contrast, a number of proactive journalists and bloggers have launched the coronafake.ru website, which publishes false news about the pandemic (Fakes about coronavirus, 2020). Here we can find fakes that were posted on various social networks.

Despite the fact that regional media are more familiar with the specific situation on the ground, they still were not immune from the publication of false information. For example, the website “Kommersant.Ufa” published material that two sites at the Northern cemetery in Ufa have been allocated for the burial of the dead from the coronavirus. They are supposedly designed for 1000 people. It also says that the municipal budgetary institution “Integrated special service centre of Ufa” a special instruction has been created for such burials, which provides for a reduction in the number of participants in the funeral, as well as the burial of bodies in a closed coffin (At the Northern cemetery of Ufa, a territory is reserved for the burial of victims of COVID-19, 2020).

This information contributes to the formation of a disturbing picture among the audience associated with the hundreds of deaths. It turned out that the information is not true. It was officially denied by the city administration.

Next, we will consider the publication “A patient with COVID-19 who survived after mechanical ventilation told how the disease proceeded” in the Tatarstan media outlet “Realnoe Vremya” (Actual times) (A patient with COVID-19 who survived after mechanical ventilation told how the disease proceeded, 2020). The media event was created specifically to take part in the hype surrounding the coronavirus infection pandemic. With the help of a glorification strategy, the publication creates a media event that will fit into the information agenda that has already gained momentum. The presentation method shows in the most colourful way that the media event was formed only for the sake of the hype.

Very often we see a media event formed on the basis of a small inconsequential fact. An example is the publication in the newspaper Kazanskije vedomosti “Moscow buys tests for coronavirus from Kazan” (Moscow buys tests for coronavirus from Kazan, 2020). Here, with the help of the strategy of heroization, the image of a heroic Tatarstan is created: it saves the whole country from an evil enemy. Moscow laboratories purchased from the enterprise new tests, which were developed in the Kazan laboratory. As a consequence of the formation of this media event, one can consider the fake news: after all, it was impossible to declare that Moscow was buying from Kazan on the basis of the fact that happened, because these tests are sold by some enterprise that has nothing to do with Kazan.

In the article “Parcels from China must be treated with an antiseptic: scientists from KFU talked about the fight against coronavirus”, the Prokazan edition formed a media event that looked more like an intrigue (Parcels from China must be treated with an antiseptic, 2020). Note that during

the formation of the text, a substitution took place, and as a result, a fake entered the media space. The fact is that further it was explained in the publication that information about the disinfection of Chinese parcels is just another myth.

The publication in the media outlet “Idel.Realii”: “Coronavirus and trust: why data on the spread of COVID-19 in Tatarstan and Russia are unreliable” forms a media event based on empty comments and fake data (Coronavirus and trust: why data on the spread of COVID-19 in Tatarstan and Russia are unreliable, 2020). The media event turns out to be a real fake, since it does not contain a real event. That is, the media outlet does a favour to readers, as if worming its way into confidence by forming the next media event from the already existing information and making a certain compilation of media events.

Thus, in the context of the coronavirus pandemic, media resources create false news aimed at manipulating consciousness. Some media outlets do not check the news for veracity and create flashy headlines for this unverified content in order to attract large audiences. The flood of negative information can sow an even greater fear of illness. In this case, people will begin to make even more wrong decisions. As a result, the number of victims will increase, and this will become another news feed for media resources. In fairness, it should be noted that law enforcement agencies were actively working during this period to identify and eliminate false content in the media sphere (The Prosecutor General revealed new fakes about the coronavirus on the network, 2020).

However, the huge amount of information in the network space does not allow taking adequate measures to eliminate the flow of lies. Here, the problem of compliance with ethical standards on the part of journalists and all creators of media content come to the fore. The best solution to this problem is, in our opinion, more purposeful work of specialized sites (such as Stopkoronavirus.rf) with their active presence on all platforms and social networks.

In the course of the study, the process of development of manipulative technologies in the context of the activities of media resources was studied. Unfortunately, a large number of media resources by their journalists and creators of media content conduct their activities in bad faith violating the ethics of the journalist and not checking information. Manipulation in the information space has increased dramatically since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. People will always be ready to learn new facts related to the pandemic, because it concerns everyone. Taking advantage of this, some media resources settled down to a

course of attracting the attention of the audience through unverified or false information. In these conditions, the flow of information has increased causing panic or promoting anti-scientific methods of treatment. The spread of false information is also influenced by the fact that the last is freely sold on the Internet, making it easy to buy and distribute fakes.

The main methods of manipulation in this context are: label-sticking, the method of creating information feeds, inventing a non-existent fact, and using oppositions.

With the decrease in the threat of a pandemic, the scale of the use of manipulative technologies in the media space remains quite large. At the moment, neither journalists nor the state have the ability to regulate this situation and eradicate false information completely.

To eliminate manipulation in a pandemic, it is necessary to strengthen the effectiveness of specialized media resources with their active presence on all platforms and social networks.

CONCLUSIONS

Thus, it can be argued that media resources have become one of the main tools for manipulating public opinion. They continue to dictate their values, behaviours and norms to the audience. This can be seen most clearly in the Internet space, since the regulatory documents governing information flows have not been fully developed here. Manipulative technologies have become even more actively used in a pandemic, since in such a difficult situation, the vast majority of media resources began to focus in their information agenda on news related to the coronavirus and self-isolation, giving less preference to other topics.

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