СОВРЕМЕННЫЕ ПРОБЛЕМЫ
МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНОЙ КОММУНИКАЦИИ

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THE ROLE AND MODERN TECHNIQUES
OF MASS MEDIA INFLUENCE

[*Гущина Л.В.* Роль и современные техники воздействия
средств массовой информации]

The present paper deals with the role and modern techniques of mass media influence. It is based on the ideas of T. van Dijk, O.F. Lindholm, A. Toffler and others. The aim of the present article consists of revealing a number of negative effects of mass media influence and enumeration of its main manipulative techniques. The author discusses the role of mass media as of a significant force in modern culture which is capable to affect both kids and adults, forming and shaping a special quazi-reality for them. In conclusion, the given paper defines the importance of recognizing and understanding mass media techniques as they will help you get back control of your own perception of the real world.

Key words: mass media, mediated culture, manipulative techniques, manipulation.

Since the invention of telegraph, radio and television which enable contacts with a large audience, the social impact of communication via the mass media has been a subject of intense research by political and social scientists. On the whole, mass media is communication that reaches a large audience, whether it is written, broadcast, or spoken. This includes television, radio, ads, movies, the Internet, newspapers, magazines, etc. The current generation and especially children are turning into an extreme media culture now. Kids and teenagers get hooked on media pretty fast, consuming a great amount of it every day. Smartphones, laptops can be found even in primary school now. Although TV and the Internet have dominated the mass media, movies and magazines also play a powerful role in culture, as do other forms of media. If we take into account how much time teenagers spend on watching TV and movies, reading magazines and newspapers, and listening to music we get a normal constant stream of media consumption which has a huge and negative effect on the way they see themselves and their own perception of reality. Reality is definitely a difficult term. What is real and who shapes, forms and controls it, persuading us what perfect body, an ideal man / woman should be, what we should do in our life and what role in society we should have according to our gender, social status, etc. [2].

Communities and individuals are bombarded constantly with messages from a multitude of sources including TV, billboards, and magazines, to name a few. These messages promote not only products, but moods, attitudes, and a sense of what is and is not important. Mass media, for example, makes possible the concept of celebrity: without the ability of movies, magazines, and news media to reach across thousands of miles, people could not become famous [1, p. 27].

Thus, mass media is a significant force in modern culture. Sociologists usually refer to this as a *mediated culture* where media reflects and creates the culture. Certainly, the current level of media saturation has not always existed. As recently as the 1960s and 1970s, television, for example, consisted of primarily three networks, public broadcasting, and a few local independent stations. These channels aimed their programming primarily at two-parent, middle-class families. Even so, some middle-class households did not even own a television. But today, one can find a television in the poorest of homes, and multiple TVs in most middle-class homes.

Not only has availability increased, but programming is increasingly diverse with shows aimed to please all ages, incomes, backgrounds, and attitudes. This widespread availability and exposure makes television the primary focus of most mass-media discussions. More recently, the Internet has increased its role exponentially as more businesses and households "sign on" [3].

What is the role of the media in this complex contemporary framework of social, economic and cultural forces? Markets, politics, policies, exploitation, and marginalization all need an ideological basis. Such ideologies require production and reproduction through public text and talk, which in our modern times are largely generated or mediated by the mass media [1, p. 28].

T. van Dijk metaphorically describes Europe and America as mansions of the mind, i.e. ideological constructs. The fundamental question of his is, whether the mass media are among the architects of their construction or the designers of their destruction? Are the media in the North largely part of the forces of domination, or do they rather contribute to real democracy, that is, to ethnic, cultural, social, economic and political diversity and equality? Or do we find the (usual) pattern of contradictions, placing some media on the bad side of domination, some others at the good side of resistance, and some somewhere in the middle? Examining the evidence, he admits that these facts do not seem to give much reason for optimism [1, p. 29]. To be sure, where ethnic conflict and racism are concerned, most mainstream media will reject extremism, violence, and blatant discrimination and exclusion. They, thereby, follow the official ideology of tolerance and equality propagated by national Constitutions and the chartas of the United Nations and other international organizations. But locally and in actual practice, the role of the media is less positive.

The scholar enumerated a number of examples, for instance, insisting on some documents that witness how ethnicism and racism are exacerbated by at least some of the media, as well as by the political and social elites that control them or have preferential access to them, the role of television and much of the press in the rise of nationalism in Serbia, the use of radio to incite ethnic hatred in Rwanda.

Similar observations maybe made for the role of the media in ethnic conflicts in South Asia and even in several parts of our former USSR. Moreover, some researchers keep on showing how most of the Western media were and are still engaged in the reproduction of stereotypes and prejudices against the so-called *others* in or from the South. More generally and globally, the prevalent prejudices produced or supported in the media are being used to create the collective states of mind that pitch the United States in the modern and democratic West, against those, who are mostly associated with the well-known orientalist schema of a primitive, dictatorial, violent, and terrorist Islam, Arabs, or fundamentalism.

Hence, our first impression of this role of the media in the general social and political situation seems to suggest that the media have sided with the powerful. The media did so by providing the dominant news values, headlines, stories, op-ed articles, topics, metaphors, and descrip-

tions that could be used as the basis for the legitimization and naturalization of ethnic and social inequality, both locally and globally. The society can be influenced both by news and entertainment mass media, i.e. media effects. It is hardly controversial to say what these media sources can affect our view of the world. Control of action usually implies loss of some freedom. Freedom of the press should, therefore, also be understood as power of the press. Given the rule of intentions, purposes, and goals in the definition of action, however, action control presupposes *mind control*. This is the essence of persuasive social power, and typical of the power of the media and of other types of public discourse. Modern mass media has created new opportunities for controlling the contents and distribution of information, increasing the efficiency of its usage. A real revolution has occurred in social and political management. The main orientation of the evolution of power technologies and the purpose of their alterations and improvement involve the usage of the smallest expenses of means in order to gain the maximum effect of impact on people, providing their voluntary subordination [1, p. 30].

A. Toffler notes that the superior quality and the greatest efficiency of the modern power is given by the knowledge that allow, firstly, to achieve the required goals, spending power resources minimally; secondly, to convict people in their own personal interests in this purpose, and, thirdly, to turn their opponents into allies [4]. The traditional study of media effects, thus, needs to be reformulated in terms of cognitive processes and representations.

There are some techniques as follows:

1. *priming*: media messages may help us recall all the ideas, knowledge or experience. For example, a new story of the French presidential election may recall some information about French economy, memories of the trips to Paris, or remind a person on a special sort of cheese;

2. *agenda-setting* refers to the fact that media control the information we get and therefore what we think about. Thus, editors have a lot of power here, because they are ultimately the ones to decide what we are thinking about;

3. *framing* is a particular spin applied to the message. It often refers to shaping our own opinions of the news, and who is a good guy in the situation. If we compare techniques No2 and No3, we should state that *agenda-setting* is choosing *which stories* to tell, while *framing* is choosing *how to tell* them;

4. *cultivation*: after a great deal of hours in front of TV we start to blur the lines between the real world and what is on TV. Some media messages like ads and public information campaigns are designed to change our attitude or behavior. Factors which increase their success include likability, credibility, attractiveness or the source of the arguments used and people agree with them. Media also play the role in persuading people to adopt new ideas or practice. They first communicate messages about a new idea which then spread to interpersonal networks, suspending over time, to include social leaders, peers and the community. This eventually leads to the adoption of the idea or innovation, reaching a critical mass.

Nowadays it is impossible to avoid media influence. But by understanding the way it works you can win back control of your perception and seek to have a balance both of the world and the people in it.

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