Manipulation of social consciousness through mass media

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Information is an important part of modern human life. Information is becoming a more significant element of modern life along with education and the way people interact with information today to a greater extent defines the level of their existence.

Possession of information and education in 21-century determine a modern person's status in society. Along with the sphere of education, information field determines the fields of labour and economy and influences the sphere of state politics. Manipulation of information and also manipulation of social consciousness in our age are becoming a technology of programming people's behavior. Manipulating society one can destroy certain ideas in people's minds and on their ruins create new ideas and fundamentals, for example of a new ideology.

Telecommunications system as a major joint of channels of information delivery obtains dominating place in human environment. "Manipulation of information is akin to disinformation…" scholar Vladimir Volkov writes in his "History of Disinformation". He writes that manipulation as destruction has three aims:

1. Demoralization of the nation by disintegration of groups making it up
2. Discrediting of authorities and their values
3. Neutralization of masses to prevent all forms of spontaneous behavior in favour of the rules set and at a certain moment to peacefully bring to power a small group of people.

Another researcher Sergey Kara-Murza in his book "Manipulation of consciousness" marks out three major features of manipulation:

1. Manipulation is a kind of spiritual and psychological influence when the spirit and mental structures of individuality are on target
2. Manipulation is a concealed influence the fact of which should not be noticed by the object of manipulation
3. Manipulation influence requires considerable specialist skill and knowledge.

Researcher Herbert Franke in his work "Manipulated man" writes as follows: "Under manipulation in most cases we should understand a mental influence made secretly, consequently to the detriment of those at whom it is aimed."

According to all these studies, manipulation of information through mass media is aimed at society. In scientists' opinions', manipulation becomes necessary when the state is interested in popularization of some ideas and tries to build an ideological foundation for justifying certain measures of influence. Thus propaganda works directly for ideological needs of the state and those at the head of the state.

With the development of economy and general commercialization of mass media information also becomes a commodity, that is an article of trade and media owners have to make it marketable ignoring the fact that media are first of all a social institution and only then a private business enterprise. Very often proceeding from their business interests private media owners try to improve their product and make it more appropriate for the consumer needs and requirements. And consumer of that product is the audience.

Mass media address their reports to society and every report is proposed for its own addressee.

Nature of manipulation

As a rule manipulation is a double impact when along with an open message manipulator sends the addressee a coded signal to incite in his/her mind images necessary to him. Manipulation as a technology based on suggestion exerts influence of people, and often achieves
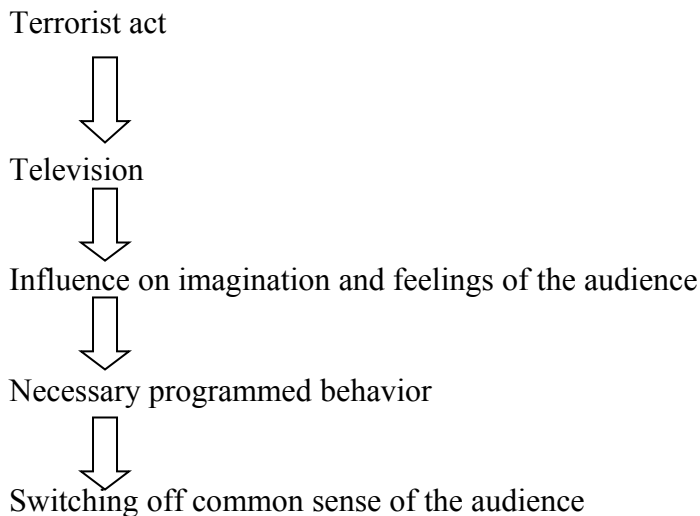
their obedience not through their minds but feelings. Suggestion is a deep feeling of psyche that emerged earlier than analytical thought.

Besides the notion of suggestion there is also the notion of persuasion and the two notions are quite different. What is the difference in principle between suggestion and persuasion? As a rule, suggestion is achieved through a manipulation method. It is based on human feelings. Persuasion, on the contrary is based on logical foundation. During persuasion facts, arguments and explanations are used. They stipulate for an active part of the man who is offered a number of arguments that he comprehends, accepts or declines. The difference in principle between suggestion and persuasion is that suggestion penetrates along with consciousness of the man also into his mental sphere and settles there as any object of passive perception.

So, suggestion is an intrusion of an idea into human mind without his/her own active part. This suggestion affects the person not by logical conviction, but be directly influencing mental sphere – implanting ideas through feelings and emotions. Another difference between suggestion and persuasion is that on the level of psychological processes perception is directly connected with imagination that newly combines the objects once fixed in memory. Since imagination is less connected with logic it is more vulnerable and sensitive to external impact. Transforming in mind impressions received once imagination creates mental or perceptive images. In their turn these images build emotions. Such a strong means of influence on social consciousness as terrorism linked with TV, for example is based on such combination of imagination and feelings.

Links between terrorism and TV

Observing how terrorist acts take place and how they are then reflected in news items we can reveal certain regularity.

Terrorist act

⇩

Television

⇩

Influence on imagination and feelings of the audience

⇩

Necessary programmed behavior

⇩

Switching off common sense of the audience

Analyzing that stage-by-stage influence of the terrorist act and its reflection in the news program one can follow what is going on the fact. As a rule, the major goal of terror is bullying and creation of unequal fear. Fear occurs when TV reports on a terrorist act or hostage-taking. It is no secret that everyone by the TV set at that moment imagines himself in shoes of the terrorist act victims. Thus it leads to natural identification of oneself with the man seen in this or that situation. In such situation consciousness and mind are gripped by emotions overwhelm the person and reduce his critical introspection. So, manipulation emotions of the audience through TV terrorists or those interested in broadcasting that report attract attention to their news. They need to have the news remembered by the man. For this purpose it is broadcast repeatedly as an actively used means of holding attention. Such features of news reports as stability and intensity of repeating reports are used. Also technological peculiarities of TV are used including:
-	words of announcer;
-	music;

-       visual images of recording.

Analyzing once again what is happening in reality we notice that when a man receives a message his interaction with his memory is divided into two stages. First we have a passive subconscious memorization, then information is processed by intellect. When emotionally coloured, information is "implanted" in memory and starts to influence consciousness. As a result of repetition it is remembered, this memorization is involuntary, like an advertisement usually remembered quickly and insensibly.

Actuality of the theme

According to B.E. Kretov, a special place in political communication is occupied by an exchange of information between the government and those governed in order to get their consent to government decisions while everyone governed tries to express his needs and make them public. These two parties can achieve consent only through communication – information exchange. To achieve unity with the people the authorities try through mass media to implant their ideas meeting their own interests in people. Conflicts and contradictions are inevitable in such structure of society because democratic press focuses on freedom, glasnost, debates and human rights while army and police concentrate attention on discipline, secrecy, security and patriotism, or speak about the need to use force.

Going back to the issue after 11 September 2001 an atmosphere of fear of terrorist acts has been spread across the world through mass media. As a result in all countries of the world state control over mass media has been increased as a justification of the "national security" idea.

Manipulation always supposes an audience - representatives of society. Representatives of society under the influence of various reports become part of the masses and in the process of transformation of separate individuals to a "collective crowd" obtain features peculiar to the masses:

1.   Tendency towards depersonalization – individualism is swallowed up by mass consciousness under the influence of impulses.

2.   Predominance of sensible over conscious – intellect is overwhelmed by feelings and instincts

3.   Intellect and the level of moral values fall

4.   The level of responsibility falls sharply.

All these signs make the group pf people especially vulnerable and sensible to various manipulations of the authorities.

Aesthetic and semantic information

All information in its turn can be divided into two groups: aesthetic information and semantic information. Aesthetic information does not submit to the logic and arouses certain mental state – emotions and reaction rather than reflects the reality. More stable, it creates an atmosphere in human consciousness. Any aesthetic information is aimed not at understanding but suggestion therefore it can easily become an instrument of abuse.

Semantic, or notional as it is often called, information is based on persuasion and interest and is addressed to logic and common sense. It was semantic information that played an important role in political activities before an active media involvement in politics. The developments are assessed by semantic information methods, through analytical perception – expert opinions.

In practical sense the authorities prefer aesthetic information to semantic because it is able to prepare actions contradictory to logic and real state of affairs which sometimes is useful for the elite in power. It is a kind of phenomenon because esthetic information is aimed not at comprehension but at suggestion of stable symbols by means of various effects.

Since mass media as a social institution has the status of an official source of information enjoying a high level of confidence of broad audience, evaluative information is expected from them. That evaluative information is inclined to form public opinion. If in practical sense the

press is based on semantic wave, TV uses its audio and video potential and influences aesthetic perception of consciousness of the audience. TV is the major instrument of political influence on the audience because of its objective technical properties.

Principles of TV aesthetics

TV is built out of mosaic images representing the entire world as reports not connected by monosemantic logical link. Reports coming in to the viewer's mind break the general mosaic dispersion trying to join them in semantic unity. The text read out by announcer is taken an obvious truth because of the very special status of TV as a media institution. If announcer reads out the text against the background of video images recorded on the scene of action that text is taken as the last truth.

In view of the fact that TV enjoys common confidence of the people it is difficult for a separate person to critically value a development. This also happens because aesthetic information in the form of audio and video flow is built not logically. There is no consistence, argumentation and sensible context in that flow if it is not added by an announcer's text.

Manipulative coding of the report is unnoticed for the mass audience because the difference between the reality and its interpretation is almost intangible while distortion of reality is inevitable. Here such methods of presenting information as repetition, breaking-up, urgency and sensational nature of report are used. Also the absence of alternative sources of information, one-sided presentation of the news and concealment of alternative news are used. So a virtual reality is built up instead of the reflection of the true reality.

A technology of isolating the addressee from other influence is often used. A method of simplifying the news presentation, making it stereotype and the use of various metaphors are used.

Language of manipulation

It is assumed that a "correct" language would be that used by mass media journalists. This means that a "correct" language for TV is that used by announcer reading out the text given by an editor who worked a journalist's material as recommended by the chief. So news is "designed" at a TV news channel. With the help of words and video a context of a report is created that can always be changed, simplified or complicated. Such manipulation is closely connected with nature of human perception. Man by his nature subconsciously is attracted by simplified explanations. There is a certain feature of human consciousness that adjusts all new information to the existing stereotypes. The method of such simplification helps manipulator demonstrate the major idea that should be suggested to the audience in a brief, strong and impressive form – assertion. As a rule, the audience accepts that news without thinking.

A major method of strengthening the stereotypes in mind is repetition. Repetition gives the news an additional feature of assertion, in other words turns it into an idea fixe, idea impels to action. Technology of propaganda is based on that very technique of repetition. A nature of urgency helps the report make a strong influence on the audience, urgency increases manipulation opportunities. The technique of breaking-up the report leads to the loss of sense and integrity of the report.

An event presented with attached significance and originality is artificial and distorted by its importance. A shade of sensation is attached to the news artificially. Usually this is done because under the cover of sensation there is a concealed development that the public should not know. Very often sensation is used to put an end to a scandal or psychosis when it is necessary to distract the public attention. In many countries where the fate of state posts is decided by elections success of this or that political force depends not on how convincing is the ideological programme of its candidate but on how competently he managed to organize the show in media. The candidate's chance to win the election campaign depends on whether he/she managed to be the focus of the media campaign.

There are also official and unofficial news. Official news as a rule supports the already existing distribution of forces and reflects the views of the ruling structures in this society and at this moment. Unofficial news are that coming from opposition sources. Radically different from the official news unofficial ones shake up that distribution of forces. For propaganda purposes an information asymmetry is used because in every society official ideology is opposed to unofficial one.

There is also a method of coverage asymmetry when one phenomenon is covered fully and another is silenced. In everyday life every person can notice that one event is covered positively another is negatively. In this sense we see that information asymmetry disappears gradually and man gets used to a one-sided interpretation: positive or negative.

As a result of qualitative and quantitative analysis of Uzbek press publications the author of this research revealed the major technologies used. In the qualitative sense work was aimed at studying manipulation technologies – the use of metaphors, stereotypes and repetitions. In quantitative sense the number of definite cliche repeatedly used by publications was calculated.

To analyze Uzbek media Internet news sites of "Turkiston Press" and "UzA" news agencies and "Narodnoye slovo" newspaper were chosen. The analysis showed that news are presented one-sidedly. The chosen materials lack the balance of news presentation. All developments are covered predominantly positively. Due to their frequent repetition an effect of imposing ideas and effect of coverage asymmetry occur.

Also concealment of information sources and the use of hints technology without giving any names are used< for example, "foreign good-wishers" or "some Western politicians". Such metaphors are also used: "certain dark forces", "renegades who sold out motherland for a song", "incendiary rascals", "and dark forces are watchful and waiting for their time to come". Very often absolutely polar, positive in shade metaphors are used about others. Such different features divide people into "good" and "bad" and stress propaganda orientation of the given publication.

There is more neutral information on "Turkiston Press" News Agency site because its format differs from that of the two aforementioned publications. It can be said that information is presented more professionally from the point of view of impartiality.

Reading excerpts from various press reports one can see attempts to stereotype, standardize and simplify the developments. But very often publications presenting various opinions and trends, express them through their journalists thus purposefully addressing them to the audience.

Professionalism of media journalists when the quality of materials offered is thoroughly checked into authenticity of facts and coloration of events cannot always guarantee a high level of audience's confidence in the source of information. Correspondence between publications and information products criteria – standards including efficiency, objectivity, authenticity and expression of one's own opinion irrespective of political conditions, make media an institution of confidence, an ideal one strives for. For the time being a major problem is self-censorship of the journalists themselves expressed in their presentation of this or that report. There are facts when based on expert opinions, the publication gives its own assessment of an event and from these experts' lips imposes "a correct interpretation" and sham objectivity on the audience thus using the method of false analytics.

The audience usually expects evaluative information from media. This is explained by the fact that mass media as a social institution have a status of an official source of information which the masses trust in highly. The analysis showed that there are also mentions of anonymous authoritative sources which suggest an idea of concealment of a news and thus creation of a "virtual" reality instead of the reflection of the truth.

Major conclusions
Analyzing publications of some media of Uzbekistan one can note such most frequently used technique of manipulation as the following:
- Stereotype;
- "polarization" of information flow;

- isolation of the addressee from other influence – the lack of alternative sources of information;
- partial concealment of information;
- building reports with the use of professional terms;
- simplification;
- standardization;
- repetition.

Special media manipulation technique includes information asymmetry and coverage asymmetry. Here we can also note the use of metaphors, fixation on authoritative and often anonymous sources, methods of contrast and false analogy and stereotype reports.

Media materials are not always professional from the point of view of personal journalist passions and the desire to express their own views. Very often, relying on experts' opinions a publication gives partial, one-sided evaluation of an event. Taking into consideration that manipulation technologies are also improving, society must more appeal to social responsibility of journalists themselves and to their observing journalist ethics as a basis of journalist's professionalism. Informing, entertaining and educating the audience, mass media must try to correspond to the reputation of a progressive innovative institution of society supplying it with maximum objective and efficient information. Journalists must try to refrain from clear statements in favour of this or that party, trying to observe the balance and avoid extreme assessments of the real situations.

The lack of extreme expressions and propaganda stereotype makes the source of information deserving confidence. The presence of anonymous and authoritative sources of information excludes any alternative interpretation of the news. Thus a certain stereotype is consolidated in the minds of the audience.

According the qualitative and quantitative analysis, the more the publication tries to meet the high world standards the less it is inclined to use manipulation technologies to attract the attention of readers. Proportionally to the growth of journalist responsibility before society, not only before his editor, requirements of professionalism in journalism also grow.

At present progressive mass media consider themselves as a socially responsible institution. At the same time, the less is the media engaged the less it is used as an instrument of influence on the minds of its audience. So, economic independence of media is of great importance. Society, protecting its own interests must more appeal to the journalists' social responsibility, their professionalism and their observing of journalist ethics as a fundamental principle of professionalism in journalism.

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