

Information Manipulation as a Category of Communication Recipient's Information Discomfort

Olena Rosinska, Oksana Zhuravska, Olha Bykova, Vitaliy Gandziuk

Abstract: *The research focuses on a level of consumers' awareness regarding the specific nature of the manipulative influence of mass media upon their consciousness. A free-associative experiment allows determining how much "information manipulation" consumers understand it as a specific phenomenon of mass media. It is important to determine the comprehension of this notion to form the strategies for the preparation of professional journalists.*

The manipulative influence of mass media is determined by an assignment to influence on the consciousness of the information consumer to form views, concepts and/or behavioral models. While researching the level of awareness of mass media manipulative influence, individuals demonstrate an understanding that this influence is quite notable and is dangerous both for their personal information comfort and for social reality.

Media education for media content consumers, which is topical nowadays, requires a preliminary understanding of all the mechanisms and consequences of manipulative influence by mass media, that is why the research focuses on the exploration of the association area for the concept of "manipulation", "information manipulation". The research demonstrates that manipulative technologies are often based on stereotypization and mythologization of reality as the methods of manipulative generalization.

Keywords: *consciousness, manipulation, mass media, psychosemantics, stereotype, technology.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The research is based on a range of theories: a psychosemantic approach to human consciousness (O. Bondarenko, O. Lapshova, V. Petrenko), a social consciousness theory (A. Leontiev, O. Lozova, L. Vygotsky); a mass media influence theory (J. Baudrillard, J. Klapper, M. McLuhan, V. Popova), a theory of ethnic stereotypes (O. Lozova, V. Petrenko, O. Ulybina), a theory of social stereotypes (W. Lippman, L. Mardyieva, S. Osmachko), a theory of manipulation by mass consciousness (S. Arifkhanova, S. Kara-Murza, E. Aronson, A. Pratkanis, I. Smirnov, Ye. Beznosiuk, A. Zhuravliov, A. Manoilo, H. Hrachov, I. Melnyk, D. Frolov, R. Sulzmann, V. Krysko, R. Harris, A. Mykhnenko).

Initially, the phenomenon of manipulative influence on awareness was mostly researched in the area of psychology,

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Olena Rosinska, Associate Professor in Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, Kyiv, Ukraine.

Oksana Zhuravska, Associate Professor in Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, Kyiv, Ukraine

Olha Bykova, Professor in Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, Kyiv, Ukraine.

Vitaliy Gandziuk, Associate Professor in Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, Kyiv, Ukraine

particularly, by such scientists as R. Garyfullin, Ye. Dotsenko, O. Leontiev, Kh. Lung, K. Provant,

B. Sheldon. The mechanisms of manipulative behavior formation, particularly in the area of communication were of special interest for researchers (E. Berne, E. Fromm, E. Shostrom, A. Ellis, O. Connor, S. Kara-Murza, G. Kovaliov, I. Melnyk, V. Pankratov, etc.).

The issue of manipulative influence on consciousness as one of the kinds of social and psychological influence has been researched within several scientific areas: sociology and politology (K. Gadzhyiev, M. Holovaty, J. Graber, G. Grachev, O. Dashchakivska, V. Dubytska, L. Levchenko, A. Lytovchenko, I. Melnyk, A. Mikhnenko, L. Kochubei, J. Manheim, M. Montgomery, A. Naliotov, Ye. Petrakova, O. Riabokon, A. Tsuladze, H. Schiller, J. Wilson), psychology (T. Poda, R. Garyfullin, N. Hrebin, P. Ekman, V. Shpak, M. Mokliak, M. Boichenko, V. Bushanskyi, S. Leontiev, U. Ki, G. Leech, etc.), social communications (O. Vasylevych, V. Bryzhko, V. Kravchuk, O. Kononenko, etc.), public relations (S. Black, K. Holovynskyi, Zh.-P. Hurevych, O. Zernetska, P. Zernetskyi, M. Karpenko, L. Kochubei, Ye. Petrakova, V. Polianska, H. Pocheptsov, A. Borecca), etc. Comprehension of information manipulation perception by the information consumer is important in the context of global media influence upon the human consciousness structure. That can be disclosed through other key notions, including "misperception", "illusion", which have mostly been researched in the area of philosophy, sociology and social philosophy (P. Zabotin, D. Horskyi, V. Kazibekova, I. Radunska, F. Selivanov, Ye. Chudinov). The issue concerning the correlation between truth and misperceptions, particularly social ones, is especially topical.

Studying the influence of mass media on the ordinary consciousness through the use of stereotyped thinking is important for research of misperceptions of ordinary consciousness that are often generated by stereotypical constructs. Particularly, the ethnical stereotypes, which, as we will see during the process of empiric research, are quite long-lasting (O. Lozova, V. Petrenko, O. Ulybina).

II. METHODOLOGY

A free associative experiment was held in September – November 2019 with the students of 1st and 2nd years, majoring in "Journalism", "International Journalism", "Advertisement and Public Relations" and "Publishing and Editing".

The method of a free associative experiment allowed avoiding any limitations in respondents' reactions towards a stimulus word. The replies were sent through Google-form, which provided an opportunity to engage maximum amount of respondents. 118 people, aged

17-20 (100%), particularly 21 men (17.9%) and 97 women (82.2%) took part in the experiment. This selection allows making conclusions about peculiarities of forming of "information manipulation" notion in a particular age-specific and professional environment, however, that does not provide grounds to specify gender or age differences. In further research, the comparison of age-related indicators when middle-aged people involved and determination of professional peculiarities of notion formation can be productive.

The experiment participants were offered to provide 5 associations towards the stimulus word of "information manipulation", which is an important notion of the professional area in the preparation of future journalists.

The results represented have been described using general scientific methods: analysis used to review the latest researches on the issue, and synthesis to analyze the results collected and to summarize the results of the experiment fulfilled, as well as a special method – a statistical analysis used while describing the results of the free associative experiment, determined frequency of reactions to the stimulus word.

III. RESULT

The research is based on several key hypotheses of "information manipulation" concept perception, particularly those we have analyzed before.

Exploring the notion of psychological-information "information influence" notion, first of all, and defines manipulations as a hidden influence [6]. Morton Deutsch and Harold B. Gerard have developed a theory of information influence as a basis for manipulation by thoughts and behavior.

Ye. Dotsenko defines the manipulation as a "kind of hidden psychological influence, the skillful performance of which leads to the initiation of the intentions for the other person, not meeting his/her topical wishes" [4, p. 59] and specifies such principal indicators of manipulation as a psychological influence, an attitude to another individual as to a method of achieving own purposes, a hidden mode of the influence, the use of psychological pressure, a game.

The manipulation can be considered as a system of psychological influence, which is oriented on the propagation of illusive worldview. Moreover, psychologists specify such relevant qualities of a personality, which are most likely to fall under the influence: insufficiently developed logical thinking, sensitiveness, feeling of inferiority, trustfulness, etc. [2].

O. Vasylevych studies a political aspect of media manipulation, which, in his opinion, is, first of all, a part of a "technology of power, which in the information age has substituted such types of power as violence and force" [11]. It is significant, that the author determines the specifics of manipulation through the description of "information violence".

While researching the association area, we can trace the correlation of the results received with those theoretical provisions, which were the basis. The free association experiment made freedom in choosing associations possible since it has not been limited it with instruction concerning a

part-of-speech distinctive feature, synthetic role, etc. Moreover, it has been specified that a concept-stimulus with particular part-of-speech distinctive feature has preconditioned the part-of-speech distinctive feature of responses, however, not with an absolute indicator.

245 different responses, not taking into account repetitions, have been received. Speaking about the information manipulation notion, the majority of the researches connect it with the information and psychological influence, i.e. influence onto the individual's consciousness with further formation of images, contexts, behavioral responses. The associative response of "influence" (psychological influence, influence on consciousness, influence on opinion, influence on behavior) has appeared to be the most frequent – 40 answers.

Moreover, a whole conceptual area, illustrating the information manipulation methods arises around this association: "contortion", "unreliability", "presentation of information in favourable light", "disinformation", "censorship", "distraction", "suggestion", "provoking interest", as well as the results of information influence: "behavior management", "unsafety/insecurity", "aggression", "fear", "constructed reality/artificiality", "hate", "isolation", "change in views", "distrust", "inability", "pressure", "slavery", "incomprehension", "change in the area of activity", etc. In Table-I, we presented the respondents' associations related to the conceptual sphere of information manipulation, ordered by frequency.

Table-I: Conceptual area of the associative responses "information manipulation methods" and "results of information influence"

	<i>Types of associative response</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
<i>information manipulation methods</i>	contortion	12
	unreliability	5
	presentation of information in favourable light	4
	disinformation	3
	censorship	2
	distraction	2
	suggestion	1
	provoking interest	1
<i>results of information influence</i>	behavior management	7
	unsafety/insecurity	5
	aggression	5
	fear	5
	constructed reality/artificiality	4
	hate	3
	isolation	1
	change in views	1
	distrust	1
	inability	1
	pressure	1

Types of associative response		Frequency
	slavery	1
	incomprehension	1
	change in the area of activity	1

The respondents consider information manipulation as a threat, which will have consequences of different types. The association area of the “information manipulation” in our research provides an opportunity to state that the respondents understand the importance of this information phenomenon, particularly, the following responses have been the most frequent: “influence” (influence on consciousness), “propaganda”, “lie”, “hard sell/advertising”, “deceit”, “quote out of context/contortion”, “suggestion”, “extortion online/extortion”, “manipulation”, “control”, “personal position”, “news/fake news”, “unreliability”, “behavior management”, “open personal data”, “fraud”, “insecurity/unsafety”, “censorship”, “aggression”, “fear”, “network/Internet”, “mass media”. The frequency of these reactions is given in Table-II (total of 245 answers).

Table- II: The association area of the “information manipulation”

№	Types of associative response	Frequency	Percent of total 245
1.	influence	40	16.3
2.	propaganda	28	11.4
3.	lie	18	7.3
4.	hard sell/advertising	15	6.1
5.	deceit	13	5.3
6.	quote out of context/contortion	12	4.9
7.	suggestion	12	4.9
8.	extortion online/extortion	11	4.5
9.	manipulation	11	4.5
10.	news/fake news	9	3.7
11.	personal position	7	2.9
12.	control	7	2.9
13.	behavior management	7	2.9
14.	open personal data	7	2.9
15.	unreliability	5	2
16.	fraud	5	2
17.	insecurity/unsafety	5	2
18.	censorship	5	2
19.	aggression	5	2
20.	fear	5	2
21.	network/Internet	5	2
22.	mass media	5	2
23.	other	8	3.3

Among the associations there should be detached a whole range of those that reflect the understanding of information misrepresentation the manipulation is based on: “deceit” – 13, “quote out of context” – 12, “contortion” – 12, “provision of information in favourable light” – 5, “unreliability” – 5, “disinformation” – 3, “censorship” – 2, “distraction” – 2,

“suggestion” – 1, “kindle interest” – 1.

One of information influence kinds relates to the spreading of negative information, which is a planned manipulation, leads to mistaken decisions specified by the third person’s interests. Since the respondents study professional disciplines majoring in Journalism, they demonstrate a particular level in understanding a necessity to provide reliable information, fact-checking, etc.: “deceit” – 13, “quote out of context/contortion” – 12, “suggestion” – 12, “blackmailing online” – 11, “manipulation” – 11, “control” – 7, “provision of information in favourable light (advantage)” – 4, “agitation” – 4, “constructed reality/artificiality” – 4, “disinformation” – 3, “zombifying” – 3, “infomercial” – 3, “neglecting users’ interests” – 1, “flattery” – 1, “veiled reality” – 1, “interest provoking” – 1, “falsity” – 1, “distraction” – 2, “suggestion” – 1, “special order news” – 1, “prejudice” – 1, “suppression of information” – 1.

Also, the classification can be complemented with the associations demonstrating ideas about the mass media system functioning in general (“mass media” (5); “media space” (3); television (3), newspaper (2)) and a technology of its functioning (“strategy” (3), “tactics” (1), “hacker/programmer” (3), “clickbait” (1), “specially-ordered news” (1), “media person/authority” (1), “journalism” (1).

Neill Fitzpatrick determines several kinds of information manipulation, which completely correlates with the association area of the concept under research:

1. **Fake news**, that is specified as follows: fake news is used to mean “misleading or inaccurate information spread via social media as a way to manipulate the media and the public” [5, p. 49]. The following notions are close to this working definition of a notion offered by the author in the association area of “information manipulation” concept: “deceit” – 13, “news/fake news” – 9, “untrue information” – 5, “provision of information in favourable light (advantage)” – 4; “contorted provision of information” – 2; “constructed reality/artificiality” – 4; “presentation of news only negatively” – 3; “infoglut” – 3. This interpretation of the “information manipulation” notion provides the majority of responses.

2. **Competition** – “primarily be used in conjunction with the term news to refer to the efforts of a journalist or news organization finding and reporting a story or stories before another journalist or news organization is able to” [5, p. 49]. This interpretation of the notion provides an inconsiderable amount of responses from the respondents: “non-qualitative information” – 1, “filter” – 1, “fact-checking” – 1, “poor competence” – 1, “naivety” – 1.

3. **Social media** – “include various popular platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. At times, these platforms will be mentioned specifically but, in some cases, social media will be used as an all-inclusive term” [5, p. 49].

The responses belonging to this group are also non-abundant: “open personal data” – 7, “network/Internet” – 5, “spam” – 1, “information war” – 1, “cyberbullying” – 1.

Thematic associations divided into 10 main groups:
– *the area of psychological influence*: (“influence/influence on consciousness”, “deceit”, “touting”, “manipulation”,

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“control”, “fraud”, “behavior management”, “suggestion”, “stereotypes”, “illusion”);

– ways of misrepresenting the information for its manipulation (“deceit”, “quote out of context/contortion”, “contortion”, “provision of information in favourable light”, “unreliability”, “disinformation”, “censorship”, “distraction”, “veiled reality”, “suggestion”, “interest provoking”, “interpretation in the way advantageous for someone”, “conscious provision of untrue information”);

– consequences of manipulative influence (“behavior management”, “unsafety/insecurity”, “aggression”, “fear”, “constructed reality/artificiality”, “hate”, “isolation”, “change of views”, “distrust”, “inability”, “pressure”, “slavery”, “lack of understanding”, “change of area of activity”, “dependence”, “inability to think independently”, “desperation”, “discomfort”, “destabilization”);

– emotional area (“aggression”, “fear”, “hate”, “offence”, “egoism”, “humiliation”, “insincerity”, “naivety”);

– area of information security (“security”; “censorship”, “openness of personal data/personal data”, “responsibility”, “terror/terrorism”, “threat”, “tracking”, “cyberbullying”, “information war”, “Internet security”);

– social area (“power”, “crime”, “violation”, “society”, “totalitarianism”, “destabilization”, “public opinion”, “pseudo-patriotism”);

– mass media activity area (“mass media”, “television”, “newspaper”, “networks”, “the yellow press”, “journalism”, “media person”, “fact checking”);

– the area of intellectual-and-analytical activity: (“strategy”, “tactics”, “choice”, “task”, “idea”, “options”, “stereotypes”);

– the area of advertising and public relations (“advertising/hard-sell advertising”, “PR”);

– the area of judgmental and offensive responses, associations with elements of hate speech (“shadow”, “hands”; “puppet master”, “web”, “spider”, “stitching”, “letters”, “puppet”, “pigs”, “stupidity”).

Respondents’ response rates are presented in Table III according to their breakdown by semantic group.

The analysis made allows making conclusions that the majority of responses directly relate semantically to a stimulus word, i.e. show a central logical response (78%), peripheral responses amount to 22%.

Table- III: Frequency of reactions in semantic groups

Types of associative response	Freq	Thematic groups	
<i>influence/influence on consciousness</i>	40	the area of psychological influence	
deceit	13		
touting	12		
manipulation	11		
control, behavior management	7		
fraud	5		
suggestion, stereotypes, illusion	1		
<i>deceit</i>	13		ways of misrepresenting the information for its
quote out of context/contortion, contortion	12		
provision of information in favourable light, unreliability	5		

Types of associative response	Freq	Thematic groups
disinformation	3	
censorship, distraction, veiled reality	2	
suggestion, interest provoking, interpretation in the way advantageous for someone, conscious provision of untrue information	1	
<i>behavior management</i>	7	consequences of manipulative influence
unsafety/insecurity, aggression, fear	5	
constructed reality/artificiality	4	
hate	3	
isolation, change of views	2	
distrust, inability, pressure, slavery, lack of understanding, change of area of activity, dependence, inability to think independently, desperation, discomfort, destabilization	1	
<i>aggression, fear</i>	5	emotional
hate, offence, egoism, humiliation, insincerity, naivety	1	
openness of personal data/personal data	7	information security
censorship	5	
security	3	
responsibility, terror/terrorism	2	
threat, tracking, cyberbullying, information war, Internet security	1	
<i>power</i>	4	social area
crime, violation	2	
society, totalitarianism, destabilization, public opinion, pseudo-patriotism	1	
<i>mass media</i>	5	mass media activity area
television	3	
Newspaper, networks	2	
the yellow press, journalism, media person, fact checking	1	
<i>strategy</i>	3	intellectual/analytical activity
tactics, choice, task, idea, options, stereotypes	1	
<i>advertising/hard-sell advertising</i>	15	advertising / PR
PR	1	
<i>shadow hands puppet master, puppet, web, spider, stitching, letters, pigs, stupidity</i>	1	Judgmental/offensive

Among the associations discovered as a result of the free-associative experiment, one can detach a block of typical association areas, which are traditionally found out during the research. Such responses are primary, particularly “influence”, “deceit”, “propaganda”, “advertising”, “misperception”. Frequent (typical) responses determine a basis of perception by the students of a key notion in their professional activity – information area.



However, the researchers paid little attention to the connection of the information manipulation with the activity of mass media as bearers and distributors of information; instead, this area has become quite topical for the students majoring in Journalism (educational programs of Journalism, Advertising and Public Reaction, Editing and Publishing).

Among the associations received regarding the stimulus word, one can detach those which did not seem related to the stimulus word: sexism (1), option (1), task (1), letters (1), hand (1).

Analysis concerning the grammar component

The association area of “information manipulation” concept provides a whole range of paradigmatic relations of associations.

Regarding the frequency, paradigmatic relations between associations, i.e. those that belong to the same grammar class: influence, pressure, hard sell, suggestion, persuading, agitation, etc., prevail. This is completely specified by typical reactions to the stimulus word, which usually causes a relevant reaction about the part-of-speech distinctive feature.

Selection of an attribute component (notion + notion attribute) to the stimulus word or a word-response is also typical: “untrue information”, “unchecked information”, “hard sell advertising”; however, these responses have become non-frequent among the respondents’ answers. Instead, the constructions of a noun with an attribute of action and a noun-object subordinate to it were used with a particular frequency: presentation of information, a contortion of information, misrepresentation of information, etc.

IV. DISCUSSION

A notion-stimulus provided a range of interesting peripheral responses, particularly, the “yellow press” – 1, “journalism” – 1, “media person” – 1, “fact-checking” – 1, “strategy” – 3, “tactics” – 1, “choice” – 1, “task” – 1, “idea” – 1, “options” – 1, “stereotypes” – 1, “shadow” – 1, “hands” – 1, “puppet-master” – 1, “a web” – 1, “a spider” – 1, “stitching” – 1, “letters” – 1, “puppet” – 1, “PR” – 1, “no analysis” – 1, “stereotypes” – 1, “judgements” – 1, demonstrated as non-frequent, but while further studying the association areas of such concepts as “information security”, “information culture”, “information comfort”, “information discomfort” being researched within this theme, there is an opportunity to find out the points of convergence of association areas of information area concepts.

Thus, the researches of the association area of “information manipulation” concept demonstrates specific results related to the details in preparation of specialists majoring in Journalism, particularly, their understanding of the connection of information manipulation and the quality of information presentation by mass media, quality of information checking, reliability of sources, accuracy and preciseness of formulations.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE SCOPE

1. The research provides a possibility to conclude that interpretation of “information manipulation” notion can significantly differ for different categories of subjects, particularly, involved in different professional areas.

2. The information manipulation as a conceptual notion has to be considered on the border of such areas as psychology/media psychology, sociology, communication studies. The results of the association experiment confirm the interdisciplinary nature of “information manipulation” concept and a possibility of its research in different theoretical and applicable scientific fields, particularly, psycholinguistic (study of the linguistic field of the concept), media psychological (the understanding of information comfort by information consumer), communicative (information security as a guarantee), etc.

3. The association field of “information manipulation” notion provides an opportunity to detach different thematic groups, particularly: the area of psychological influence; the models of information contortion to manipulate information; the consequences of manipulative influence; the emotional area; the area of information security; the social area; the area of mass-media activity; the area of intellectual-and-analytical activity; the area of advertisement and public relations; the area of emotional-and-judgmental and descriptive responses, associations with some features of hate speech.

4. Paradigmatic relations between associations, i.e. those which belong to the same grammar class, prevailed according to the frequency; selection of an attributive component (notion + notion attribute) to a word-response or a stimulus word, a structure of a noun with an action attribute and a noun-object subordinate to it are also typical.

5. Since the “information manipulation” notion is topical for media psychological researches and researches in the area of social communications, it is promising to continue its studying; particularly, making correlations with the notions of “information culture”, “information comfort”, “information discomfort”, “information security”, etc.

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AUTHORS PROFILE



Olena Rosinska Associate Professor in Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, Kyiv, Ukraine. More than 20 years' experience of teaching, a scholar, the author of more than 50 publications on text symbolism, social communications, communication psychology. Area of research interest: mediatext, communication theory, psychology of media. A researcher of the media influence on the ordinary consciousness of the information consumer.



Oksana Zhuravska Associate Professor in Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, Kyiv, Ukraine. More than 20 years' experience of teaching, a scholar, the author of more than 50 publications on text symbolism, social communications, communication psychology. Area of research interest: mediatext, communication theory, psychology of media. A researcher of reportage, a structure of chronotope of mediatext.



Olha Bykova Candidate of Sciences in Social Communications, assistant professor in Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, Kyiv, Ukraine. More than 10 years' experience of teaching, a scholar, the author of more than 60 publications on journalistic genre, history and theory of reportage. Area of research interest: mediatext, theory of journalism. A researcher of genres of journalism, history and theory of journalism of 20-21 centuries.



Vitaliy Gandziuk, Ph.D. in Social Communication, Associate Professor in Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, Kyiv, Ukraine. Head of the Department of Journalism and New Media. Area of research interests: journalism, journalism, history of the Ukrainian journalism, genreology, media-linguistics. The author of about a 60 publications devoted to media issues.