

Conference Paper

Features of Propaganda and Manipulation in the Modern Information Space of New Media

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Abstract

This article discusses propaganda and manipulation as social phenomena and explores the features of its manifestations in the new media. The phenomenon of propaganda has been a recurrent topic of debate in public spaces over the past decades; there are dozens of international studies on the problems of its harm and necessity. The information environment constantly raises questions about the objectivity and reliability of the data distributed by the media, and their impact on public opinion and socio-political events in the world. With the development of communication technologies and the advent of new media, propaganda and manipulation reach a new level, gaining tremendous opportunities for influencing the individual and society. However, there is still no effective system of interaction with similar phenomena. Under the influence of constant informational impact in society, the system of values is rapidly changing and there is a reassessment of the main social constructs. The state, the sphere of education and the social sphere are need of new approaches to interacting with information and a changing society. The aims of the study are to identify the views of Russian youth regarding the current government and its policies, as well as determine the level of radicalism and protest potential of youth. This research discusses some propaganda technologies, especially relevant today. Examples of positive and negative propaganda are highlighted. Their specificity is substantiated and specific examples of such an impact are given, which entail significant socio-political events. The results of an empirical study have revealed mechanisms of the media influence on the individuals. The study has fixed the problem of radical political views formation, under the influence of the information environment created by new media. The necessity of creating an effective system to counter these phenomena in all spheres of social activity is substantiated. The problems and the direction requiring further research are formulated.

Keywords: propaganda, manipulation, new media, propaganda technologies, information environment, content, social networks, Internet.

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1. Introduction

The meaning of propaganda comes from the latin "propaganda" — to be disseminated. Propaganda does not have a generally accepted definition. Thus, in the Great Soviet Encyclopedia, propaganda is defined as "the dissemination of public, philosophical, scientific, artistic and other views and ideas with the aim of introducing them into the public consciousness and activating mass practical activity" [8]. The British Encyclopedia, in turn, defines it as: "Propaganda — facts, arguments, rumors, half-truths, or lies — to influence public opinion. This is a more or less systematic effort to manipulate the beliefs, relationships or actions of other people" [1].

Thus, in the Soviet encyclopedia, propaganda is designated as a positive and rather necessary phenomenon, while in the British source propaganda is equated with misinformation for the purpose of manipulation.

Propaganda is one of the natural signs of human society. It appears with the first states, since it would be impossible to create complex social constructs without a universal belief in certain ideals and patterns of behavior, and they cannot be instilled into everyone without resorting to the power of persuasion and suggestion, that is, propaganda. As in ancient Egypt people obeyed the power of the pharaoh, believing that he was the son of the sun and the messenger of heaven. That is, in ancient Rome and further in medieval Europe Christianity was spread through religious propaganda.

Propaganda cannot be evaluated as unambiguously positive or negative thing. For example, in the Russian Federation programs are being implemented at the state level to promote sports and a healthy lifestyle, family values, patriotism of democracy and tolerance [3]. At the same time in Russia and many other countries negative propaganda is purposefully imposed by interested people: the processes of radical communities' formation, totalitarian religious sects, the growth of chauvinism and militaristic moods are taking place.

One of the components of propaganda is manipulation. In this context, it means the manipulation of human consciousness, mass consciousness, the ability to force a person to do something that is necessary for the subject of manipulation. It is generally accepted that manipulation is definitely a negative phenomenon and, therefore, is a sign of only negative propaganda, but this is not always the case. For example, in raising a child, the parent or teacher can use manipulative methods to force the child to perform some useful actions, and also in psychology or medicine, often hidden, deceitful or violent manipulations ultimately lead to the cure of the patient.

Propaganda and manipulation have always been one of the tools for managing people. With the help of these mechanisms, wars were unleashed, ambitious alliances were concluded, cities were built and new continents opened. The propaganda toolkit has changed and evolved from heroic epos and mythology to religious rites and sermons, from grandiose statues and paintings to educational lectures and slogans. With the advent of the press and the first information revolution, propaganda received newspapers, leaflets and propaganda posters, but with the second information revolution everything changed even more.

At the beginning of the last century, propaganda was carried out using leaflets, propaganda posters and print media, which required high costs, resources and the availability of an entire infrastructure for its production and distribution. With the advent of radio and television broadcasting, new forms of propaganda appeared, it received more coverage and development, including due to the informational confrontation of the two superpowers of the XX century. Currently, with the development of the Internet and information technology, propaganda has received new means and impact technologies that need to be investigated.

New media began to stand out in the global information space at the end of the 20th century, when interactive Internet publications began to appear with the development of the Internet. They differed from the classical media, as they used innovative methods of interaction and work with their audience. Gradually, new mass media became one of the main sources of information, and their audience grows every year. Thus, according to research of Deloitte CIS Research Center, the majority of Russian citizens still prefer television as the main source of information, but its popularity decreases every year (62% in 2015, 57% in 2016, 52% in 2017). At the same time Internet and new media are steadily increasing their audience (from 22% in 2015 to 32% in 2017). It can also be assumed a further increase in the popularity of new Internet media, as 82% of 18–24 year olds and 59% of 25–34 year olds give their preference to them, while television is preferred by an older audience [10].

2. Methodology and Methods

In an empirical study, we aimed to identify the views of Russian youth regarding the current government and its policies, as well as to determine the level of radicalism and youth protest potential. The study was conducted in the form of an electronic and written survey.

The questionnaire is in tabular form and includes closed-ended questions, offering a choice of answer options, and open-ended questions.

The methods of the study were selected in accordance with the objectives of the study:

- a theoretical and regulatory analysis of the features of the Internet and social networks content as a cause and tool for the formation of radical views in the youth environment.
- a study the Internet content and social networks influence on the formation of radical political and extremist views and attitudes of Russian youth.

The hypothesis was the assertion that the formation of radical political and extremist views in the youth environment is affected by the negative information environment, which is formed under the influence of certain Internet sources. During the study, students of schools in the city of Yekaterinburg and students of the Ural Federal University in the aged 14–30 years were interviewed. As a result of the survey, the estimated positions of each respondent on key issues were identified, as well as a list of the media and media resources to which the respondents have the greatest confidence.

3. Results and Discussion

During the study, a direct correlation was observed between the radical political views presence and the sources of information indicated as preferred.

Based on the results of the study, we concluded that the information environment in which destructive views are formed includes a set of influential sources of information that carry out targeted influence with the goal of radicalizing youth and introducing destructive patterns of citizens' behavior [2].

New media have a number of advantageous differences, which gives them an advantage over the old ones, such as: high speed of information collection and distribution, freedom of choice by the user, high interactivity, the provision of information in various forms, as well as the ability to communicate with other users and transfer feedback to the authors.

It should also be noted the diversity of sites on which new media operate. These include independent online publications, personal sites of media personalities, blog platforms for maintaining online diaries, video aggregators, social networks and instant messengers, etc. In this case, such multichannelness increases the influence and reach

of the audience of new media dozens of times, in comparison with classical media. New media can provide their audience with news around the clock, in any way convenient for the user, whether it's the format of blog or news feed on a site, newsletters or news feeds in the mail or in the messenger, news in V-kontakte or twitter, etc. Thus, new media form their own information field, which includes more and more participants and consumers.

Internet resources and media platforms form a new plane of social life, into which all social relations and interactions smoothly flow. Also inevitably there is scope for propaganda and manipulation. Moreover, these phenomena go to a new level, since in modern man there is an overabundance of information and the criticality of his thinking is greatly reduced. User simply does not have the opportunity to verify the accuracy of the facts, since each news is circulated by dozens of media and getting to the source is worth a lot of work. At the same time, news too quickly succeeds each other, which does not allow for a long time to focus on one problem [5]. But here one should not forget about the positive propaganda. For example, with the development of social networks, adherents of sports and a healthy lifestyle have gained wide coverage, now millions of people around the world get acquainted with the aesthetics and philosophy of sports, they themselves try to exercise, eat right and keep fit, which certainly has a beneficial effect on overall health population.

However, there are many examples of negative propaganda and media manipulation carried out for political, ideological and economic purposes. They are relatively harmless examples of tobacco and alcohol companies sponsoring smoking and drinking cinema scenes [4], to specific political accusations that have consequences across the country and around the world.

With the growing political confrontation between East and West, the informational confrontation also increases. There is lack of coincidence that in recent years the term "Fake News" has become widespread. And in 2016, Harvard University called the word "post-truth" the word of the year — circumstances in which objective facts are less significant in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotions and personal beliefs [7]. People are becoming the most vulnerable to propaganda, especially considering all the possibilities of new media.

Consider some of the manipulation and propaganda technologies used both in classical media and in new media. They are as follows:

- manipulations with the truth of information, for example, the intentional suppression of certain facts, the submission of only part of the information or the intentional statement of only one position with the submission of its best sides;
- a biased selection of topics and materials at the Internet is one of the simplest actions, as themed communities intentionally offer content of one orientation, and social network algorithms automatically offer the user only the content that he most readily consumes;
- emotional commenting on what is happening: this phenomenon gives the user a vector of reflection and feelings, leads to certain experiences and uses the emotional state of increased suggestibility to introduce specific attitudes into the user's mind that are not in doubt;
- misinforming content, the dissemination of fake information to reinforce or incite conflict on one or another basis;
- technologies for manipulating opinion polls that create the illusion of mass views and prevalence of certain views in wide sections of society;
- "CNN effect", which consists in demonstrating real-time events that are amazing to the psyche of the audience. Due to the effect of the "presence" of the user, "in the thick of events" (for example, during rocket attacks on the territories of military conflicts), an emotional strengthening of the psychological impact exerted on the audience is achieved, which is reinforced by a focused commentary.

A striking example of the use of several technologies could serve as propaganda "chemical attack" supposedly implemented by government forces in Syria Duma in April 2018. Dozens of anti-government Syrian and Western media and media outlets disseminated this news, backing it up with a video report from the scene and figures of dozens of dead and injured in a chemical airstrike, which became the reason for the strike by anti-Assad coalition forces in the person of the USA, Great Britain and France against state military facilities in Syria. However, after a thorough investigation by international organizations, no evidence of a chemical attack was found; moreover, the video report recording the victims of the airstrike turned out to be staged [9]. Despite this, cause of the competent informational work of the media involved, the general public did not have any doubts about the veracity of these statements. In turn, the refuting results of the investigation were not so widespread.

Also, new media have a tremendous ability to mobilize the broad masses of the population in the event of domestic political instability in the country. This can lead to riots often involving casualties. The mobilization potential of new media was first

demonstrated during the Arab spring in the late 2000s and first half of the 2010s. A number of so-called “Twitter revolutions” are associated with these technologies — revolutions and protests, most of which are coordinated through popular social networks [6].

Such events occur regularly and in our country: the mass opposition protests against corruption, for free elections, for allowing independent candidates, etc. One can argue about the justice and necessity of these actions, but the main problem is that due to the huge reach of the audience and the influence of new media and individual resources, people who do not have any relation to the original reason for the protest adjoin these shares. This happens under the influence of propaganda and manipulation by individuals and entire media groups, in whose interests certain internal political processes are formed.

4. Conclusions

Our survey has fixed that with the development of new media, propaganda and manipulation technologies are becoming more complex and more effective. Targeted advertising technologies are becoming more complex and psychologically thought out, ideological and political manipulations are also improving and becoming less noticeable. Under certain conditions, modern man is no longer able to distinguish his \ her own views and needs from those imposed. It should be noted that the main propaganda blow falls on young people, since it is young people who are more involved in the modern information space and it is young people who are consumers of the content of new media resources, advertising integrations, information products, etc.

Therefore, the state and society need mechanisms to counter negative propaganda and manipulations of all kinds on the Internet and social networks. This problem requires an integrated approach: pedagogical, psychological, ideological and legislative. These issues will form the basis of our further research.

In the XXI century, there is a big battle for citizens’ minds. Russia must not lose this battle.

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