MEDIA (INCLUDING SOCIAL MEDIA) AND PUBLIC MANIPULATION

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Abstract

In last four years the entire Europe is under a real pressure provoked by the Russian hybrid war. It is questioned why people are so afraid by the Russian process of manipulation, through mass media and social media, in a time in which specialists bring proves that smart people are not easy to manipulate. Manipulation is not something new, nor is mass-media. The threat seems to be seen in the fact that media companies can be bribed. In another way, social media appears to be the main trap in the process of manipulation not only because of the multitude of networks and people but because of the users' intellectual laziness. The causes of manipulation are different, but in our opinion, it is important to see which are related with the human psychology, and the psychology of the Romanian people. Romanian psychologist Daniel David, but not only him, underlined that the solution to solve the problem is the education process. In order to educate people, it is necessary to understand the causes of manipulation and how they can be eradicated through training.

Keywords: *manipulation, mass-media, psychological portrait, social-media, education.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Researcher Daniel David, the author of "The Psychology of the Romanian People, tried to explain why people are so vulnerable to false information.

In the explanation he underlines that people consider that in order to manage information, it is necessary to make two steps:the first refers to understanding information and the second is related to determining its value of truth.

The psychologist emphasizes that studies suggest that things are different, when the new information is understandable, automatically people think it is true. In these caseswe discover that the second stage is not over and then people come to believe that everything they understand is true (FLORESCU, 2017).

If we fail to go through the second step, the false/irrelevant information remains in our minds as true.

David points out that the second step is not taken when: "on the one hand, we receive too much information at once and we cannot analyse it critically.This happens very often nowadays when we are bombarded with information from all sides, as the cognitive resources of the mind are limited and on the other hand, we are too stressed or tired (we do not have executive / attentive cognitive resources to function properly and to go through this stage) (FLORESCU, 2017).

2. THE CAUSES OF MANIPULATION

The starting point is determined by professor Motru's statement: "As long as there is no clear consciousness of the spiritual end of this life, the interpretation of the data will be unsafe, as long as there are no statistical data and no experience gained from the experience of the Romanian people. Data can at most justify a spiritual reality revealed by precise and significant institutions, but when this finality is not revealed, or is revealed in a nebulous and fragmentary way, then they can use at most the signs that are subject to discussion. The consciousness of the Roman people has so far only the finality of its spirituality the vague indices and indices (DAVID, 2015)".

The acoustic picture of the Romanian ethos comes from a study conducted by professor Daniel David in his work on the psychology of the Romanians and emphasizes that: the psychological profile of the surface is in some incomplete segments developed, not expressing the potential that we have. Therefore, our high potential for

cognitive / emotional intelligence, creativity and learning is not exploited (DAVID, 2015).

The Romans have a repressive and avoided cultural style, which makes them defensive, expressing complexities of inferiority, and if they are compensated, in complexes of superiority, low scores on values like universality (concern for the general good), benevolence (goodwill, the concern for the well-known ones), hedonism (search for pleasure), stimulation (search for the new) and self-determination (autonomy / independence), demonstrate that the Romans attach a certain importance to these values, but apparently do this in order to make a good impression (DAVID, 2015).

The causality of this ethos could be bidirectional and interacting, starting from our history, presence on the periphery of empires, and acting as a battle theatre (in this context, we developed defence mechanisms). Thus, the mood for a lasting construction has been diluted, trust in people, especially foreigners, has diminished, and indiscipline has become a form of resistance for the weak in order to protect culture from the strong.

3. DANGER OF MANIPULATION THROUGH THE MASS-MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA

In order to deviate behaviours and dominate public opinion thinking, manipulation uses means such as persuasion and misinformation.

Persuasion is defined as the action through which the author of a message supports an idea, trying to convince the audience. Persuasion does not contain negative intentionality in the sense that it does not conceal facts, but only highlights the favourable ones.

Misinformation represents any intervention on the basic elements of a communication process, intervention that deliberately alters the messages transmitted in order to determine in the receivers certain attitudes, reactions and actions desired by a particular social agent.

Persuasion represents the process by which a person's attitudes or behaviour are, without duress, influenced by communications from other people. One's attitudes and behaviour are also affected by other factors (for example, verbal threats, physical coercion, one's physiological states). Not all communication is intended to be persuasive; other purposes include informing or entertaining (BRITANNICA, n.d.).

Persuasion often involves manipulating people, and for this reason many find this exercise distasteful.

Others might argue that, without some degree of social control and mutual accommodation, such as that obtained through persuasion, the human community becomes disordered. In this way, persuasion gains moral acceptability when the alternatives are considered.

The process of persuasion can be analysed in a preliminary way by distinguishing communication (as the cause or stimulus) from the associated changes in attitudes (as the effect or response).

The ultimate goal of the persuasive process is for individuals (or a group) to carry out the behaviour implied by the new attitudinal position

Some, but by no means all, theorists emphasize similarities between education and persuasion.

They consider that persuasion closely resembles the teaching of new information through informative communication. Thus, since repetition in communication modifies learning, they infer that it has a persuasive impact as well and that the principles of verbal learning and conditioning are widely and profitably applied by persuaders (as, for example, in the judicious repetition of television advertisements). The learning approach tends to emphasize attention, comprehension, and retention of the message.

One's reaction to persuasive communication depends in part on the message and to a considerable extent on the way in which an individual perceives or interprets it. Perceptual theorists regard persuasion as altering the person's perception of any object of his attitudes. Perceptual approaches also rest on the evidence that the receiver's preconceptions are at least as important as the message content in determining what will be understood. The approach stresses attention and comprehension (BRITANNICA, n.d.).

Other theories view the person confronted with persuasive communication as being in the vexing role of finding some reasonable

compromise among many conflicting forces - e.g., individual desires, existing attitudes, new information, and the social pressures originating from sources outside the individual. Those who stress this conflict-resolution model (frequently called congruity, balance, consistency, or dissonance theorists) focus on how people weigh these forces in adjusting their attitudes (BRITANNICA, n.d.).

The belief that persuasion is an honourable and effective means of discovering the truth is seen by the fact that it is the basis for modern economics, counselling practices and the legal system. In addition, persuasion also represents the foundation of democracy.

Persuasion is ingrained within human communication.When communicating, people both intentionally and unintentionally promote certain beliefs and behaviours. If communication is the bridge that persuasion must cross in order to travel from the realm of ideas and intentions to that of words, understanding, decisions and action, a broken bridge just won't do (BMA GROUP, n.d)

Psychological manipulation can be defined as the exercise of undue influence through mental distortion and emotional exploitation, with the intention of seizing power, control, benefits and/or privileges at the victim's expense (NI, 2018).

It's important to note that while manipulation tactics work, often very effectively, they introduce your target to negative feelings. These negative feelings make it extremely difficult to continue using the target as an information source. If your goal is to use your target as an ongoing source of reliable information, we would caution the use of manipulation. Use these tactics sparingly and only after careful consideration regarding the possible repercussions.

The manipulation of public opinion over social media platforms emerged as a critical threat to public life. Around the world, government agencies and political parties exploit social media platforms in order to spread junk news and disinformation, exercise censorship and control, and undermine trust in the media, public institutions and science (UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD, 2018).

In 2017, the first Global Cyber Troops inventory shed light on the global organization of social media manipulation by government and political party actors. This 2018 report analyses the new trends of organized media manipulation, and the growing capacities, strategies and resources that support this phenomenon.

They found evidence of formally organized social media manipulation campaigns in 48 countries, up from 28 countries the previous year. In each country there is at least one political party or government agency using social media to manipulate public opinion domestically (COMPROP, 2018).

Much of this growth comes from countries where political parties are spreading disinformation during elections, or countries where governmental agencies feel threatened by junk news and foreign interference and are responding by developing their own computational propaganda campaigns in response (COMPROP, 2018).

In a fifth of these 48 countries - mostly across the Global South - they found evidence of disinformation campaigns operating over chat applications such as WhatsApp, Telegram and WeChat.

Computational propaganda still involves social media account automation and online commentary teams, but it is making an increasing use of paid advertisements and search engine optimization on a widening array of Internet platforms (COMPROP, 2018).

Social media has irreversibly changed the world. In just over a decade, platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat captured hundreds of millions of users around the globe, transformed our daily forms of communication and provided unprecedented, almost instant, access to information, images, and opinions of all sorts, from around the world.

While this constant flow of facts, fiction and even fantasy can be credited, or criticized, for numerous societal changes, it can also be seen as a significant factor in the public's reception and perception of "news" in the general sense and, for many, the very definition of "journalism" in a broader perspective. Numerous studies indicate, with each year that passes, that more and more people find and consume news on social media platforms, primarily Facebook, as opposed to more traditional media forms such as radio, print, and television (CHAFFEY, 2016).

This shift led to a change in the public's perceptions of journalism. Growing numbers of news consumers now find and follow sources of news that are limited to what they "like" on their personalized Facebook feeds (CHAFFEY, 2016).

Indeed, research shows that Facebook users seek out other views that align with their own. This selective news coverage can be informative but it can also create something that became known as an "echo chamber", a social media sharing experience that echoes one's beliefs and views to others and back.

At the same time, a Facebook user's news feed and perspectives can be supplemented with information from sources they do not necessarily subscribe to personally. This is material that is passed on or visible on the pages of their Facebook "friends". These online contacts may actually be real-life friends or family members but the structure of Facebook means that any user's list of "friends" can also consist of distant relatives, acquaintances from the years gone by or even complete strangers, all passing on viral videos, family photos, and news stories – both real and fake.

This growing social media-only news perspective also contributed to an erosion of the public's trust in mainstream media. In fact, the trust level dropped to an "all time low" in 2016 (UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD, 2018).

Distrust and confusion over news stories and news coverage also stemmed from an increase in the number and profile of "fake news" stories, especially in the months before and after the presidential election in the United States (BARTHEL et al., 2016).

4. INSTEAD OF CONCLUSION

The most secure form of countering manipulation through media and social media is the development of resilience.

Resilience requires knowledge and the belief that what political leaders say is true, and that their desideratum is becoming a national desideratum.

In order to develop trust, it is necessary that those who lead the destiny of states to be educated personalities for self-sacrifice in the service of the nation.

The education of society must be directed towards the cultivation of altruism, the transition from material to immaterial, from annoying, everyday life to one of history's builders.

In a society based on technology, but especially in the future society based on knowledge, the role of elite education will increase.

The area of knowledge is diversified, amplified and directed from itself to the others. This knowledge remains vigorous, clear and corrective, lacking selfishness or inoculation, meditative and analytical desire, and transformative ideas are enunciated as variants and not necessarily as truism.

This framework does not accept imposture, nor does it have any limitations on the intellectual and geographical space, because here humanity meets its cultural values, here is the progress.In this crucible science, culture and implicitly religionare put together.

In this context, education should focus on the knowledge, appreciation and evaluation of life, family, moral Christian values, and social ethics as existential axiology.

The perception and manifestation of the need for security is a decisive element in the education of the new generation, as it prepares the person for two great challenges, the elimination of fear and the assumption of risks.

Fear has an important role in social behaviour because it subjects people to it, forces them to rely on authority and, more than that, makes them easy to handle.

An educated man will always know what his rights and obligations are and what is the right relationship with the authority.

Knowledge of history provides individual political intelligence, brings man into the field of causal analysis, determines him to adopt realistic solutions to current problems, and helps him to influence the future.

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