

CONTROVERSIES ON THE MANIPULATION OF MASSES

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Abstract

Mass manipulation controversies consist of conceptual issues as well as practical ones. There is no consensus among experts regarding the definition, methods, techniques and effects of manipulation. Also, there are controversies regarding the distinctions between manipulation, misinformation and propaganda. Given its unique capabilities to influence people, mass media was and most probable will be the best way to manipulate individuals, groups of humans and communities. Although some experts said that some sorts of manipulation have positive effects, most scholars regard mass manipulation as being dangerous because of its negative effects.

Keywords: *manipulation, methods to manipulate, techniques to manipulate, mass manipulation effects, media manipulation in Kosovo war, media manipulation in second Gulf War.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The manipulation of masses represents a complex subject due to its content and the effects that it produces both on isolated individuals and on the human groups and communities. The complexity of the concept of the manipulation of masses is at the basis of many controversies in the field of the methods and techniques used to fulfil the goals that the initiators of the process propose, as well as of the effects on the target market of manipulation.

2. CONTROVERSIAL ASPECTS REGARDING THE APPEARANCE AND USE OF THE CONCEPT OF MANIPULATION

Experts and well-known authors of papers regarding mass manipulation present different points of view on the appearance and the use of the concept of manipulation.

H. Buchli, quoted by Florin Banu, states that manipulation and propaganda are as old as the human being (BANU, 2013).

Florin Banu estimates that the first manipulation was that of the snake who urged Eva to eat from the forbidden tree in order to discover the good and the evil (BIBLE, 2008).

Bogdan Teodorescu considers that manipulation was born "almost 5000 years ago, in the Nile Valley, where for the first time people believed and followed a group of dominants in order to preserve and perpetuate their power" (TEODORESCU, 2007).

There are also some opinions stating that propaganda and manipulation were initiated by Pope Gregory XV who launched the campaign "Sacra congregazione de Propaganda fide", in 1622, in order to counteract Martin Luther's Reform (HENTEA, 2008).

As far as we are concerned, we consider that the manipulation of human subjects accompanied mankind right from the beginning of its existence because the majority of the people's actions, conducted together with their peers also have an influencing component which leads to manipulation.

3. CONTROVERSIES IN THE CONCEPTUAL PLAN REGARDING THE MANIPULATION OF MASSES

3.1. Defining the manipulation of masses

Dictionary definitions and those from specialised works reveal the existence of some quite important differences between the way in which the authors understand and perceive the concept of manipulation. This situation can be

explained through the different level of knowledge and experience in using and perceiving the effects of the concept, and also in the fields in which those respective authors are well-known.

Bogdan Ficeac defines manipulation as “a situation created on purpose in order to influence the reactions and behaviour of the people who are manipulated, in the direction desired by the manipulator” (FICEAC, 2001).

Sonia Cristina Stan considers that manipulation represents “the action of changing the attitudes and behavior of a person or of a social group in order to fulfil some goals desired by someone else (people, groups, organizations) with exerting force and always giving the impression that change represents a free decision” (STAN, 2004).

Another point of view, expressed by Vladimir Volhov, a well-known French expert in the informational clash, places manipulation in the spiritual field, defining it as “the means of imposing your will, acting in a spiritual manner on the people by programming their behaviours” (VOLHOV, 2007).

Bernard Raquin defines manipulation as an activity of persuading the receptor to make his own “objective” decisions although the ideas and his way of thinking are triggered by an action which guides leads him to those conclusions that he thinks are the result of his own thinking (RAQUIN, 2007).

Mielu Zlate considers that manipulation is a form of efficient, but unethical human communication (ZLATE, 1997) and David Marin places manipulation the area of a tendentious or hidden behaviour “used by some people to achieve a machiavelic goal” (MARIN, 1996).

There are also some authors who assimilated manipulation with art which represents “an omnipresent and undoubted reality of our days which transforms opinions, attitudes, behaviours, feelings and relationships” (MUREȘAN et al., 2004).

Joule R.V and Beauvois J. L. consider that manipulation is the only way in which an actor (community) who is in an unfavourable power report with his opponent can achieve his goal (JOULE & BEAUVOIS, 1997).

Walter Lipman in his 1922 book entitled “Public opinion” defines manipulation as “a

content manufacturer”, meaning the manipulation of masses (“the savage hoard”, “the great beast”, “the spectators interested in the action”, not the participants in the action) by the leading class (the elite of the society) in order to obtain its agreement because ordinary citizens are not trained to think and decided on the important aspects of the society (VIGILANT CITIZEN, 2010). As far as we are concerned, we see manipulation as a form of communication, mediated or not, between the actor-transmitter (the manipulator) and the actor-receiver (the manipulated) in which the former wants to induce (influence, impose) a particular type of effect on the mind of the latter.

3.2. Delimitations from other influencing methods

Controversies in the conceptual plan stem not only from the definition of manipulation but also from the delimitation of manipulation from propaganda and misinformation. On this topic, the sociologist Septimiu Chelcea thinks that “propaganda is another name given to manipulation (...) they differ only in their ultimate purpose (...) only when the ultimate purpose of the persuasive agent brings prejudices to the persuaded people we deal with the manipulation phenomenon, when the end purposes of the transmitter and of the receiver are divergent, but not opposed we can talk about propaganda” (CHELCEA, 2006).

On the topic of the connections between manipulation and propaganda, Harold Laswell wrote that “propaganda is based on symbols in order to achieve its goal: the manipulation of collective attitudes” (LASWELL, 1935; BANU, 2013). And Laswell also stated that “propaganda represents the management of collective attitudes by manipulating the significant symbols” (LASWELL, 1927; BANU, 2013).

When it comes to the delimitation between manipulation and misinformation, Henri Pierre Cathala states that: “misinformation represents an ensemble of the dialectic processes deliberately put into play in order to achieve a perfidious manipulation of the people, groups or of the society on the whole with the purpose of deviating political conducts, of dominating their

thinking or even of subjugating them" (CATHALA, 1991).

Vladimir Volkov wrote that "misinformation represents the manipulation of public opinion (and not of individuals) with political purposes (otherwise it could be propaganda) of a trustful information, or not (the veracity of the information does not matter, but the way in which it is presented)" (VOLKOV, 2007).

For Ștefan Stănciugelu "manipulation represents a misinformation tool, alongside intoxication, propaganda, influence, lie, tactical trick, subversion and diversion" (STĂNCIUGELU, 2010).

As a conclusion to the above said, we mention the opinion of the journalist Călin Hentea who considers that "misinformation has extremely fluid boundaries with intoxication, influencing, propaganda, subversion and manipulation" (HENTEA, 2004).

4. METHODS AND TECHNIQUES USED TO MANIPULATE THE MASSES

4.1. Methods

Referring to this subject, Joule R.V. and Beauvois J. L. mention "the traps of the decision", "the striking", "the foot in the door", "the door in the nose", "the freezing method", "the method of catching the thief" and "you have to know when to say stop" as the most well-known manipulation methods (JOULE & BEAUVOIS, 1997).

In turn, Sebastian Bohler presents 150 experiments regarding the methods of media manipulation from which we have selected the following: "the over-information", "the surveys", "the art of influencing the human brain through advertising", "directing TV images towards the unconscious areas of our psyche", "cognitive activation" (BOHLER, 2009).

Remy Rieffel approaches "the manipulation through contextualization", "the selection of images", "persuasion through the personalization of interventions", "the theatricalization of behaviours", "the use of rhetoric and the interpretation of surveys" (RIEFFEL, 2008), methods and techniques well-known and disavowed by The U.S. National Press

Photographers Association (NPPA) Digital Manipulation Code of Ethics (REVOLVY, 2018).

Ștefan Stănciugelu presents the demonization of the adversary, the labelling, the mockery, the irony and the attack on the person as efficient mass manipulation techniques (STĂNCIUGELU, 2010).

4.2. Techniques

Sebastian Bohler presents the following mass manipulation techniques: "the rapid scrolling of images in order to attract the viewer's attention"; "associative conditioning" (preferred music and the products on sale); "technological manipulation through colours", "the tone and speech rhythm of the presented associated with adequate images in order to stimulate credibility" (BOHLER, 2009).

Remy Rieffel explores a few of the TV manipulation techniques by: "framing", "counterfeit", respectively "selecting and image processing" (RIEFFEL, 2008).

Doina Ruști studies the subliminal message as an efficient manipulation technique (RUȘTI, 2005).

Ștefan Stănciugelu mentions the march, the slogan and the ceremonial (meetings, demonstrations, manifests) in which the participants wear flags, badges, caps, uniforms etc. in order to stimulate the ideas, emotions and attitudes of the viewers towards the participants (STĂNCIUGELU, 2010).

5. CONTROVERSIES ON THE EFFECTS OF THE MANIPULATION OF MASSES

Controversies on the topic of the effects of manipulation are quite numerous and refer to the efficiency of different methods and techniques in achieving the goal set by the manipulator or by the beneficiary of the influencing actions.

The majority of experts in the field and of well-known authors from different fields of activity consider that manipulation represents a dangerous phenomenon (DOBRESCU & BĂRGĂOANU, 2002) which has negative effects on the individuals and on the human communities. There are also some opinions which state that manipulation also has some positive effects.

Education is regarded as one of these manipulation methods (BÎLBÎIE, 2010).

There are two important tendencies in assessing the result of the manipulation techniques and methods: the exaggeration and the minimalization of the effects of manipulation. Usually, exaggerating the results belongs to the authors of the methods and to those who apply them in order to be consulted and/or involved in as many such actions as possible and to make profit. Minimalizing or even denying the existence of a manipulation action is the responsibility of the beneficiaries who do not want the truth to be known and, implicitly, to expose themselves to the public blame for using manipulation.

One of the most well-known controversies from this field refers to the manipulation through: subliminal messages, surveys and audio-visual images and messages.

Subliminal messages, maned by Vance Packard "clandestine persuasion" were first used in the fifth decade of the 20th century by James Vicary in a movie, in which the character mixed the messages "drink Coca-Cola" and "eat popcorn". The initiator of the subliminal technique claimed that the sales of cola rose by 57% and those of popcorn by 18% (RUȘTI, 2005).

Subsequently, other such experiments were conducted by different experts but the results were different from those expected and this fact determined Vicary to admit that he overestimated the results in his desire to sell (promote) ideas. At present, experts, especially psychologists consider that subliminal influencing is efficient only if the target subjects are "placed" in a respectively favourable context: they possess a certain level of education and general knowledge in that particular field and the manipulation initiators and/or beneficiaries generated and maintain a certain type of psychosis, favorable for the action of manipulation (FICEAC, 2004).

Bernard Raquin claims that Russians and Americans use manipulation through acoustic sublimation techniques (RAQUIN, 2007).

Surveys impress us because they use numbers associate with maths, meaning an exact science that cannot be mystified. On the other hand, the repeated presentation of the results of surveys strengthens the conviction of a major part of the

society that they are correct. (Repetition, according to the logic of Joseph Goebbels - the ministry of Nazi propaganda - can turn a lie into truth. He claims that a lie told 1000 times still remains a lie, but a lie told 1 million times becomes a truth. Due to this way of thinking and of using the written press, the radio and the cinema in manipulating the population of Germany using symbols, images, grandiose ceremonies and personalities, "Goebbels's propagandistic machine operated at its best" (KNOPP, 2010).

On the topic of surveys, Vladimir Volhov states that "manipulation through numbers stems mostly from the fact that, unlike the word or the metaphor, numbers have the authority of precision and of impartiality. This is the reason why numbers represent some of the main goals of manipulation" (VOLKOV, 2007).

The most important controversy related to the accuracy of surveys is presented by sociologists and political scientist when they perform a comparative analysis of the survey values during electoral campaigns and the results of those elections. Most of the times, we observe important differences between surveys and the results of elections, meaning that there are greater differences than the error margins indicated by sociologists. One explanation for this situation is offered by Sebastian Bohler who claims that surveys have the tendency of deceiving us regarding the results of the elections because many people are subject to the phenomenon of imitation, called "social influence" and vote for personalities (political parties) situated on the first places (BOHLER, 2009).

On the same topic, a study belonging to The Urban Regional Sociology Centre, published in 2007, revealed that a major part of the voters in Romania take into account the results of surveys and vote for the person (political party) situated on the first place (IOAN, 2017).

Sebastian Bohler demonstrates (Bohler, Sebastian, 2009, pp. 37-38, 67-68, 131-133, 190-192, 195-196, 232-235) that mass media informs but also manipulates through **images and audio-visual messages**. With the purpose of augmenting this demonstration he publishes the results of several experiments from which it results that the images and the audio-visual messages

associated with the people's certain common psychological traits and broadcasted through television and radio stations can trigger attitudes, behaviours and states such as:

- altruism (if images with poor and homeless people are being broadcasted);
- feelings of good (if images from the nature associated with an instrumental relaxing music are being broadcasted);
- envy (when a well-known person purchases an expensive automobile);
- feelings of emotional sensibilization or even incitement to violence when the effects of some terrorist attacks or clashes between protestors and the police, or the images of the effects of some military clashes are being broadcasted;
- feelings of guilt when images of the consequences of some natural disasters are being presented, respectively images with the victims of those disasters;
- the stimulation of the need to socialize (gossip) when the radio or television stations broadcast fashionable news
- the serious voice of radio and television reporters determines the reaction of reduction and even the rejection on behalf of the listeners

6. MEDIA MANIPULATION BETWEEN MYTH AND REALITY (CASE STUDIES)

How and especially why mass-media revolves around "power vector", "the fourth power in the state", "the watchdog of democracy" and "the most efficient means of manipulation?" (BĂLBĂIE, 2010).

Someone could answer this question by saying that power isn't always exerted for the benefit of the many, meaning the members of the human society. There are numerous examples supporting this idea, starting from Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot, Idi Amin and up to Saddam Hussein.

Therefore, we can draw the conclusion that mass-media respected its condition of "a power vector" in the state when it influenced the American public opinion as well as those from NATO member states to support the decision of the Leadership Council of the Military Intervention Alliance against Serbia in order to stop the Serbian

ethnic cleansing against the Albanians in Kosovo in 1999. It is true that in the process of persuading the national public opinion and of the international community, the Western mass-media used images in order to manipulate (e.g. a Muslim child who went through the barbed wire fence of a concentration camp, in order to be saved, an untrue statement, proved after the war, because the picture was about a child being passed through barbed wire fence to visit with relatives in Albania" - details in the picture below).



Fig. 1. Kosovar refugee Agim Shala, 2, is passed through the barbed wire fence into the hands of grandparents at the camp run by United Arab Emirates in Kukes, Albania (PEPITONE, n.d.)

Also, the Western media demonized almost exclusively the Serbians for the situation in Kosovo through media articles and reportages broadcasted on the radio, respectively statements of some American and OSCE officials and of some NATO member states. In order to emphasize the guilt of the Serbians and to support the victim position of the Albanians, the Western media often used phrases and collocations referring to what the authors of the articles, reportages and TV documentaries regarded as the features and the attitudes of the Serbians: "hate", "racism", "nationalism" (understood as extremism), "paranoia", "religious fanaticism", which made them commit "war crimes", "massacres", "genocides", "ethnic cleansing" against the Albanians from that region, "the destruction of the Albanians' homes" by "arsons" and armed attacks etc. (ȘTEFĂNESCU, 2004).

Mass media and some officials also used misinformation. In this regard, one can mention that, on January 15, 1999, the head of the OSCE mission in Kosovo, the American William

Walker, said that he discovered a common graveyard near the Racak village, with the bodies of 45 Albanian citizens who were shot in the head. He blamed the Serbian forces for this massacre (ZARBABYAN, 2010). Details can be found in the picture below and in the BBC News article (NEWS.BBC, 1999).



Fig. 2. Nato crisis talks on massacre (NEWS.BBC, 1999)

Before the beginning of the NATO bombardments against some targets in Kosovo and Serbia, the German Foreign Affair Minister at that time, Ioshka Fisher, agreed with the bombardments and with sending German troops in Kosovo in order to maintain peace (FRASER, 2003). This mention is important because “Atlantic Alliance leaders, one of whom now was Fischer, had been spoiling for a war against Milosevic and had relied on falsified evidence to launch it, charged German leftists. At Racak, they claimed with some but not overwhelming documentation, the dead were KLA soldiers killed in a shoot-out, not civilians at all” (ESIWEB, 2008).

After the end of the NATO military intervention, one of the representatives of the company hired to use mass-media and the influence agents in order “to direct” public opinion from the NATO member states as well as the international community to accept the military intervention, nonchalantly said that: “we are not paid to be moral. We are professionals. We had a job to do and we did it” (FICEAC, 1998).

Mass media exerted its “power vector” status once again during 2002 and 2003, when it manipulated the American public opinion and the international community in order to support the military intervention of a so-called “Coalition

of Wills” against Iraq with the purpose of stopping the development programmes of the weapons of mass destruction and of their means carrying the target, initiated by the Saddam Hussein regime (KERR, 2003). Among the images presented by various TV channels one can also see the map below.



Fig. 3. Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction Programs (CIA, 2013)

On March 17, President George Bush Jr., in a televised speech, addressed an ultimatum to the Iraqi leader and to his sons, asking them to leave Iraq in 48 hours, in order to facilitate the country’s peaceful disarmament of the weapons of mass destruction. Otherwise, Iraq shall support a military intervention on behalf of the “Coalition of Wills” led by USA.

Because after the victorious ending of the military clash no eloquent proof of the Iraqi development of mass destruction weapon was found, the blame was put on CIA, by the head of the Congress of Inquiry Commission to investigate the causes of false information to the White House administration and the US Congress. (DRUMHELLER, & MONAGHAN, 2008; ROBERTS, 2015).

Despite the evidence that present the manipulation actions, the responsibility was not taken by its initiators. “The extent of the WMD threat posed by Iraq—the primary casus belli—was greatly exaggerated; (...) The ambiguous outcome of the war—the successful overthrow of Saddam Hussein’s regime, the failure to discover evidence of WMD and the serious

ongoing post-war problems—suggests that neither argument has been fully vindicated.” (COTTEY, 2004).

7. CONCLUSIONS

There are numerous controversies regarding the manipulation of masses, in general, and the media manipulation of masses, in particular, and they refer to both conceptual aspects, such as defining, the methods and the techniques involved, the distinction from other methods of influencing, and to the efficiency and truth regarding the use of media manipulation in different situations (taking responsibility for those action by their initiators).

It is difficult to draw a straight demarcation line between manipulation, propaganda and misinformation, because they all have the same goal of influencing masses and, at times, they use similar methods, techniques and means in order to achieve their goal.

Mass-media is considered the most efficient manipulation means and the effects of media manipulation are regarded as dangerous by experts in the field (BÎLBÎIE, 2010). Despite this truth and of the evidences that certify the development of some significant media manipulation actions, the mass communication means continue to represent an important “power vector” in the society, because democracy would be in danger without this “power without counterpower”, as professors Paul Dobrescu and Alina Bârgăoanu name mass-media (DOBRESCU & BÂRGĂOANU, 2002). On the other hand, the media sometimes has the role of “turning an unknown person into a celebrity” (LAURENT, 2005), respectively of creating heroes and so-called elites (KALI, 2016), an idea supported by Adrian Cioflâncă and Adriana Radu (CIOFLÂNCĂ & RADU, 2013).

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