



DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15688/jvolsu2.2024.5.13>

UDC 81'23:659.1
LBC 81.006

Submitted: 09.04.2024
Accepted: 20.08.2024

ASPECTS OF MEDIA MANIPULATION IN COMPLEX COMMUNICATION SITUATIONS ¹

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Abstract. The article examines the forms of manipulation in complex communication situations, the essential component of which is multidirectionality, i.e. individual communicative acts addressing multiple audiences. Since complex communication situations are multidirected, they involve various participants who are direct interlocutors, moderators, communication observers, etc. The paper discusses the phenomena of the communicative action orientation towards multiple audiences in staged communication and the participation of the manipulated audience in Internet communication. Multidirectional communication is typical for advertising and talk shows. Although the speakers in talk shows address their interlocutors directly, their statements are perceived by the audience in the studio and the TV viewers. This situation can have a manipulative effect since the latter are not aware that they are the intended recipients. In commercials, characters explain the benefits of a product to other participants in the staged communication event. However, the communication is aimed at the TV audience, which is involved in a large-scale manipulation. From the point of view of manipulation theory, questions arise, such as the effects of monitoring communication (passive participation), the extent to which the recipient themselves is part of the manipulation and the responsibility of the recipient and participant of communication in a communicative event.

Key words: media manipulation, complex communication, manipulation mechanisms, advertising, talk shows, information bubble, responsibility.

Citation. Kusse H., Shakenova M.T. Aspects of Media Manipulation in Complex Communication Situations. *Vestnik Volgogradskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Seriya 2. Yazykoznanie* [Science Journal of Volgograd State University. Linguistics], 2024, vol. 23, no. 5, pp. 161-173. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15688/jvolsu2.2024.5.13>

УДК 81'23:659.1
ББК 81.006

Дата поступления статьи: 09.04.2024
Дата принятия статьи: 20.08.2024

АСПЕКТЫ МЕДИАМАНИПУЛИРОВАНИЯ В СЛОЖНЫХ КОММУНИКАТИВНЫХ СИТУАЦИЯХ ¹

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Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются формы манипуляции в комплексных коммуникативных ситуациях, существенной составляющей которых является полиадресованность. Охарактеризованы феномены направленности коммуникативного действия на третьих лиц в инсценированной коммуникации и участие манипулируемого в манипуляции в интернет-коммуникации. Показано, что в полиадресованных комплексных коммуникативных ситуациях участники играют разные роли: непосредственные собеседники, модераторы, наблюдатели коммуникации. Приведены примеры полиадресованной коммуникации в разных жанрах

СМИ. В ток-шоу манипулятивный эффект возникает в силу того, что выступающие обращаются к партнерам по диалогу, но их высказывания воспринимаются зрителями в зале и телезрителями, которые, будучи первыми адресатами высказываний, могут не осознавать этого. В рекламе манипулятивный эффект возникает потому, что персонажи рекламных роликов объясняют преимущества определенного товара другим участникам инсценировки, однако коммуникация направлена на зрителей, при этом адресаты сами принимают участие в масштабной манипуляции. Результаты исследования обусловили необходимость обсуждения в аспекте теории манипуляции следующих вопросов: какие эффекты может иметь наблюдение за коммуникацией (пассивное участие), в какой степени сам реципиент становится частью манипуляции и какую ответственность несет получатель и участник коммуникации в коммуникативном событии.

Ключевые слова: медиаманипуляция, комплексная коммуникация, механизмы манипуляции, реклама, ток-шоу, информационный пузырь, ответственность.

Цитирование. Кусе Х., Шакенова М. Т. Аспекты медиаманипулирования в сложных коммуникативных ситуациях // Вестник Волгоградского государственного университета. Серия 2, Языкознание. – 2024. – Т. 23, № 5. – С. 161–173. – (На англ. яз.). – DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15688/jvolsu2.2024.5.13>

Introduction

The media play a crucial role in the transmission of information and the creation of images, and their impact extends to various aspects of our lives, including politics, economics, culture and social relations. Media manipulation can manifest itself in different ways. The simplest form is distraction through an excess of entertainment. Watching talk shows, films, TV beauty shows, and cooking shows, people are distracted from the pressing problems of their lives, the political and social environment, injustice, inequality, environmental disasters, etc., and thus mentally shut down and remain silent in society and politics, without realizing it. This type of manipulation, mainly called ‘bread and circuses’, dates back to the Roman Empire, with the media now playing the role of the Roman arenas. The second form of manipulation is a one-sided evaluation of facts or people. It can be either a one-sided positive evaluation of political regimes (especially pronounced in the forms of personality cults) or a one-sided negative evaluation of imaginary enemies, opponents, etc., which finds its most vivid expression in hate speech. The third form of manipulation is disinformation (fake news), which is usually a deliberate lie used to mislead people, force them to misinterpret the facts and make wrong decisions [Karabulatova, 2020].

Furthermore, it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish reality from fiction due to the effect of virtual manipulation by artificial intelligence which makes it possible to generate the voices of living or dead people and purport to reproduce documents. The fact that communication in the

media is generally multi-addressed further obscures the boundary between reality and fiction, opinion and deception. We refer to this multiple addressing as complex communication. It is explicit in such formats as talk shows, several forms of advertising, comments on the internet, social networks whose debates are public, etc. The article describes the forms of manipulative multiple addressing in complex communication situations and represents a preliminary stage in the development of a typology of complex communication. With the rapid development of digital technologies, in particular the algorithms of social networks and search engines, media manipulation is becoming even more widespread and efficient since the possibilities of integrated communication and mass dissemination of information are increasing significantly. In this regard, it is highly relevant to study the mechanisms of media manipulation in complex communication situations.

Materials and methods

Complex communication situations involve more than two communicative participants who perform different roles, such as, in the first place, direct interlocutors, then moderators, observers of communication, etc. The core of complex communication is its multidirectional nature [Karabulatova, 2020; Kussepova et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2023]. In complex communication, participants, while addressing each other directly covertly address the wider audience, such as TV viewers or Internet users, who may not be aware that they are the target audience. Similar forms

have long been used in advertising, for example, when characters present products to each other and give advice. The characters engage in verbal exchanges as if they were communicating with each other, but, in fact, in a commercial, the staged communication addresses the target audience. In talk shows, communication is also complex, as there are several vectors of communicative relationships: debaters address each other, debaters address the host of the talk show, and they all address the audience in the studio and, finally, the TV viewers. Comments and public chats on social networks are also complex communication processes where people discuss controversial issues and, at the same time, find themselves under the scrutiny of a large audience. These seemingly open formats can give rise to so-called “information bubbles” or “filter bubbles” in which the same opinions circulate.

Our article presents a theoretical and systematic description of certain types of complex communication situations in the media. We have studied English and German publications in the field of media and communication that analyzed various aspects of media manipulation and its relation to complex communication [Bondi Paganelli, 1990; Petter-Zimmer, 1990; Kühn, 1995; Burger, Luginbühl, 2014, pp. 1-37]. From the point of view of manipulation theory, questions arise such as, for example, what effects the monitoring of communication can have, to what extent seemingly passive recipients are part of the manipulation and what responsibility they bear for the outcome of a communicative event.

Discussion

Inherent in the media, manipulation and its various forms of manifestation have received considerable attention in contemporary research. These entirely different forms of manipulation often have a common ground in their criticism. The media almost always seem to serve as autonomous active intermediaries for an audience that is primarily powerless to resist manipulation and which, of several alternative presuppositions, through manipulative tricks and techniques, involuntarily chooses the one that benefits the manipulator [Kusse, Shakenova, 2024; Shakenova et al., 2020]. Expanding on the well-known concept of media “The Medium is the message”

proposed by McLuhan [McLuhan, 1967], the criticism of manipulation emphasizes that media technology (print, radio, television, Internet, etc.) determines not only the forms and contents of the transmitted messages but also their impact on the recipients. In 1988, German media philosopher Sybille Krämer wrote: “Media not only transmit messages, but have an impact that shapes the way we think, perceive, remember and communicate. <...> Media conveys the idea that our attitude to the world and, consequently, all our activities and experiences are cognizant of the world... The function is characterized by the possibilities of differentiation that media opens up and the limitations they impose” [Krämer, 1998, p. 14] (Hereinafter, the translation of quotations and examples from German or Russian into English was made by the authors of the article, unless otherwise indicated). In the first decade of the 21st century, the cultural critic Ludwig Jaeger called the media “operators that simultaneously constitute the content they store, generalize or distribute” [Jäger, 2004, p. 14] and, thereby, determine the “mentality” of their recipients. It is no coincidence that Jaeger sees here a parallel with Wilhelm von Humboldt’s philosophy of language, according to which language is “the formative organ of thought” [Jäger, 2004, p. 15]. Since language itself is a medium, we can extend the manipulation theory by saying that media form thoughts and, therefore, are manipulative.

In discussions about the manipulative effects of media, however, it is not always clear who is manipulating: the media as an anonymous force that controls people, like the force of nature, or media makers, that is, people who use media as a tool of manipulation. This situation is very similar to discussions about the principle of relativity of language: does language influence the way people think, or is it speakers who influence thought (their own and of others) through their speech?

It is impossible to ignore the fact that communication is not one-way. The communication model that includes only three elements such as the sender, the medium, and the receiver, is too simple and, at its best, is suitable only for crude propaganda or brainwashing methods in which the receiver is only a passive object of manipulation. However, in real life, the recipient is usually part of the message since communication is a joint activity of communication partners. This situation is evident in

face-to-face communication, but even in such seemingly one-sided media as television, where the recipients remain mostly passive, they can actively participate in communication thanks to the ability to turn broadcasts on and off. In new media, everyone can play an active role. In social networks, there is not one sender and many recipients, as the term *media* suggests, but a set of participants, whose number is practically unlimited. The number of third parties who can monitor this communication is also unlimited, for example, when an Internet user reads comments and discussions on social media.

Therefore, when discussing media manipulation, first of all, it is necessary to determine what communication situations we are dealing with, who is manipulating, who is the object of manipulation, and whether media users themselves are involved in the manipulation, or are merely passive recipients of manipulative acts. In this article, we will consider two forms of manipulation in complex communication situations: the orientation of the communicative action towards third parties in staged communication, and the participation of the manipulated in manipulation. It is possible to distinguish different aspects of the study of manipulation in complex communication: psychological, social, political, cultural, linguistic, rhetorical and stylistic, and others.

Now, the issues of automatic text recognition and processing are getting more and more. Methods for the automatic detection of text sentiment, intonation patterns, and speaker register changes are widely used for various applications. Thus, the automatic detection of manipulation in communication situations is becoming an increasingly important goal, including manipulation detection in social networks and online platforms. However, this paper takes a pragmalinguistic perspective on media manipulation in complex communication.

Results

Complex communication is multidirectional because it addresses different audiences. In complex communication situations, we distinguish two types of manipulation: those that focus on third parties in staged communication and those that focus on the participation of the manipulated.

The phenomenon of staged communication involves situations in which one side of the communication uses third parties (for example,

deliberately mentioning a person or group of people) to achieve its goals (to create an impression or influence the opinion of the interlocutor, to discredit or promote an image of someone or something). As a result of the participation in manipulation, the manipulated person tends to make certain decisions or act according to the manipulator's wishes without realizing that he or she involved in the manipulation. Persuasion is achieved through manipulative rhetorical techniques that play on emotions and may cause emotional distress.

1. The focus of the communicative action on third parties

Complex communication situations that involve multiple addressees (multiple addressability) occur not only in modern media but also involve everyday interactions. As we analyzed individual examples of this communicative phenomenon, we did not set the task of providing quantitative data using statistical research methods. Manipulation is a characteristic feature of conflict communication situations. In the following excerpt from the novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* by Milan Kundera, Marie-Claude, the wife of one of the characters, Franz, insults his girlfriend, Sabine. However, the insult is primarily intended to have an effect on the guests in the house. The statement is manipulative because its content does not matter to the speaker, because it is insincere and serves only to demonstrate power relations:

(1) At that point, Sabina entered the room. Marie-Claude walked up to her. After a few friendly words of greeting, Marie-Claude lifted the ceramic pendant from Sabina's neck and said in a very loud voice, What is that? How ugly! <...>

I made it myself, said Sabina. <...>

Franz suddenly saw the answer plainly: Marie-Claude proclaimed Sabina's pendant ugly because she could afford to do so.

Or to be more precise: Marie-Claude proclaimed Sabina's pendant ugly to make it clear that she could afford to tell Sabina her pendant was ugly. <...> Marie-Claude had taken advantage of the occasion to make clear to Sabina (and others) what the real balance of power was between the two of them (Kundera, 1984).

In a talk show, a dispute is a popular form of manipulation in complex communication. We did not

analyze the statistics of these disputes but focused on individual talk shows in which participants are involved in specially created situations or are assigned certain roles to achieve communicative goals, including managing public opinion or creating an image. These forms of manipulation in complex communication situations are used to influence the audience's opinion, form ideas or shape behavior. In a talk show, for instance, one interlocutor can insult another and demonstrate his strength in front of the audience, as Marie-Claude does in the excerpt described above. A well-known case on Russian television took place more than a decade ago and involved the right-wing extremist politician Vladimir Zhirinovskiy (1946–2022) who was notorious for his rudeness and used to insult not only his political opponents but also representatives of other social groups. In February 2012, on the talk show *Duel*, one of his opponents was the famous Russian pop singer Alla Pugacheva. She directly addressed the politician and listed several possible reasons for his behavior:

(2) Вы, когда хамите... ну, ладно мне, бог с вами – я к этому уже привыкла от вас – вы что хотите доказать? Когда вы врете, нагло, в эфире, в этой программе, зачем? Когда вы ведете себя настолько неприлично даже для кандидата в президенты. <...> Мой вопрос: Это часть имиджа, разрешенного вам сверху? <...> Это пробелы в воспитании вашем? Или, не дай бог, это что-то такое, с неврозом связанное. Если бы вы стали президентом, поменяли бы свою линию поведения? Потому что это все-таки на весь мир (Zhirinovskiy VS Prokhorov..., 00:00:36–00:01:35).

You, when you are rude... well, okay me, God be with you – I'm already used to it from you – what do you want to prove? When you lie, blatantly, on the air, in this program, why? When you behave so indecently, even for a presidential candidate. <...> My question is: Is this part of the image allowed to you from above? <...> Are these gaps in your upbringing? Or, God forbid, it's something related to neurosis. If you became president, would you change your line of behavior? Because it's all over the world after all ².

In his reaction, Zhirinovskiy rejected all the possible reasons for his actions and insulted his opponent again.

(3) Все? Отвечаю. Я веду себя так, как я считаю нужным. Мне имэджмайкеры не нужны. <...> Я такой, какой я есть. Я это уже сказал. В этом моя прелесть... Вы, артисты, как последние проститут-

ки ложитесь под любого руководителя за деньги. (Zhirinovskiy VS Prokhorov..., 00:01:39–00:03:25).

Have you finished? I will answer. I behave as I see fit. I don't need image makers. <...> I am who I am. I've already said that. This is my charm... You artists, like the last prostitutes, lie down under any leader for money.

Alla Pugacheva, in turn, called Zhirinovskiy a “clown and a psycho” (00:02:41–00:02:42). On the one hand, it is an argument between the two opponents who attack each other in the discussion. However, more important than the personal confrontation was the effect on the audience in the studio, who demonstrated their participation in the debate with applause and shouts, and on the audience of TV viewers, who expressed themselves mainly in comments on the Internet. In this public exhibition match, both interlocutors sought to belittle each other, although they used different tactics. Zhirinovskiy used explicit insults, and Pugacheva used questions to provoke her opponent into behavior that would disqualify him in front of the audience. The talk show host directly expressed the potential communicative effect:

(4) Вы меня извините, но то, что вы делаете. <...> Вы себя публично хороните (Zhirinovskiy VS Prokhorov..., 00:03:53–00:03:58).

I'm sorry, but what are you doing? <...> You are burying yourself in public.

In these debates, which were part of the 2012 presidential campaign, there was no discussion of political content. A personal clash served only to belittle the opponent in front of the audience. However, the effect of such clashes cannot be completely controlled by the speakers. The online newspaper NEWSru.com commented:

(5) Стоит отметить, что реакция зрителей на скандал достаточно разнообразна, и, если одни отмечают, что поведение Жириновского недостойно, другие заявляют, что он выдал «правду-матку» (Zhirinovskiy Insulted Pugacheva...).

It is worth noting that the reaction of viewers to the scandal is quite diverse, and while some note that Zhirinovskiy's behavior is unworthy, others say that he gave out the “truth of the matter”.

In complex communication, one of the widely used techniques is the manipulation through emotions, namely empathy, hope, anger, and fear, etc. They are used to elicit certain reactions from the audience, they modify their behavior or form

their opinions. On the dialog platform of the talk show *There is a way out* of the Seventh Channel of Kazakh television, a discussion was held on the popular, even, one might say, widely discussed topic of polygamy among Kazakhstanis. The presentation of the topic “Polygamy in Kazakhstan is a relic of the past or a solution to modern problems” deliberately prepared the audience for a discussion in which there will probably be those who are “for” or “against”. One of the heroes of the program, Kenishbek Satov, the husband of four wives in real life, who speaks in favor of polygamy in the studio, knowing that officially polygamy is not allowed in Kazakhstan, describes this phenomenon from the positive side, actively using words with a positive stance:

(6) Вы когда говорите слово «жена», я всегда думаю, что это женщины. У меня четыре женщины... Это все началось от **любви** к женщинам. Я **люблю** женщин. Мой папа **любил** женщин. В советское время, когда все это было запрещено и было преступно, он тоже был полигамным. У меня было три **мамы**. Я видел **ласки** три. Поэтому я был **обласканный** ребенок. <...> Я слово «жена» не понимаю, это женщина **любимая**, второе, я понимаю, это **друг**, с которым я **советуюсь**. И у нас идет акцент на **детей**. <...> Во-первых, они должны знать **уважать** мужчину, знать, кто такой мужчина. Я свои обязанности знаю. Знает ли она свои обязанности быть женой, быть в **семье**, быть в **коллективе**, быть **мамой**... Если человек **счастливый**, рядом люди будут **счастливыми** (There Is a Way..., 00:01:50–00:08:18).

When you pronounce the word “wife”, I always think that these are women. I have four women... It all started from the love of women. I love women. My dad loved women. In Soviet times, when all this was forbidden and it was criminal, he was also polygamous. I had three moms. I saw the caresses of three. That’s why I was a petted child. <...> I do not understand the word “wife”, this is a beloved woman, the second, I understand, is a friend with whom I consult. And we are focusing on children. <...> First, they should know to respect a man, to know who a man is. I know my responsibilities. Does she know her responsibilities to be a wife, to be in a family, to be in a team, to be a mom... If a person is happy, people will be happy next to him.

During his speech, this participant often used jokes and played with the TV presenter, thus endearing the audience and gaining supporters. For example:

(7) – Расскажите, пожалуйста, сколько у Вас сегодня жен?

– Хороший вопрос. Вы только что сам сказали, что один лучше два. Вы сами же ответили на этот вопрос, который мне задали. Один лучше, чем два.

– У Вас, насколько мне известно, не одна и не две?

– Да, у нас как получается, если любишь, то тогда увеличивается везде.

– Так сколько же? Мы так и не услышим конкретную цифру.

– Конкретную цифру Вам надо.

– Ну конечно же. <...>

– Давайте я так буду так угадывать. Три?

– Да. Вы говорите. Я всегда буду говорить да.

– Четыре?

– Да.

– Пять?

– Нет.

– Четыре?

– Да.

– Четыре жены (аплодисменты) (There Is a Way..., 00:01:05–00:01:38).

– Tell me, please, how many wives do you have today? – That’s a good question. You just said yourself that one is better than two. You yourself answered this question that was asked to me. One is better than two. – As far as I know, you don’t have one or two? – Yes, as it turns out, if you love, then it increases everywhere. – So how much? we didn’t hear a specific number. – You need a specific number. – Of course. <...> – Let me guess this way. Three? – Yes. You speak. I will always say yes. – Four? – Yes. – Five? – No. – Four? – Yes. – Four wives (applause).

In this example, as we can see, the game was based on a question-and-answer uni with the yes-no answer. To the question “What are your responsibilities?”, the hero of the show answered as follows, continuing to use words with a positive emotional connotation, but jokingly evading discussion of the issue of financial responsibility, emphasizing that modern women are independent and emancipated:

(8) **Поддерживать** эту женщину, **ласкать** эту женщину, **любить** эту женщину. А кормить и одевать это какое-то знаете я не знаю сейчас женщин не надо кормить? Они сами на машине ко мне подъезжают, в шубе... (There Is a Way..., 00:06:58–00:07:15).

To support this woman, to caress this woman, to love this woman. And feeding and dressing is some kind of you know, I do not know, nowadays women don’t need to be fed or? They drive up to me in a car, in a fur coat...

At the same time, the opposite opinion against polygamous marriages represented by the well-known Kazakhstan TV presenter and actor Nurtas Adambayev did not sound categorical:

(9) На самом деле, слушая Кенишбека, я понимаю, что если ему это удобно, если его жены с этим согласны, то почему бы и нет. Но это скорее какое-то исключение, частный случай... Что кривить душой, для многих мужчин многоженство – это какое-то счастье, ну, потому что есть разнообразие, есть выбор. Но как бы мечты мечтами, но есть реалии. Есть реалии. Но, к сожалению, уровень в нашей стране не такой высокий, так чтобы мужчина мог обеспечивать несколько жен (There Is a Way..., 00:12:35–00:13:37).

In fact, listening to Kenishbek, I realize that if it is convenient for him, if his wives agree with it, then why not. But this is rather an exception, a private case... For many men, polygamy is a kind of happiness, because there is variety, there is a choice. But dreams are dreams, but there are realities. There are realities. But, unfortunately, the level in our country is not so high that a man can provide for several wives.

The opinion of another guest called Iskander, speaking against polygamy, also sounded uncategorical and unconvincing:

(10) Я абсолютно не осуждаю Кенишбека. <...> Но я и не против. <...> Это связано с тем, что тогда мужчины часто воевали, был большой дисбаланс между мужчинами и женщинами. И женщины, если бы не многоженство, умерли бы от голода и нищеты. Но сейчас-то, слава богу, уже какое поколение. Моя бабушка была четвертой женой. <...> Это пережиток прошлого (There Is a Way..., 00:18:27–00:18:57).

I absolutely do not condemn Kenishbek. <...> But I don't mind either. <...> This is because at that time men often fought, there was a big imbalance between men and women. And women, if there was no polygamy, would have died of hunger and poverty. But now, thank God, what a generation. My grandmother was the fourth wife. <...> It's a relic of the past.

The participants in the talk show are not only talking to each other and expressing their opinions, but they are also trying to persuade in their opinion both their direct interlocutors and the general public. In this example, this is partly done by rational argumentation and partly through the emotional appeal of speech.

An attempt to influence third parties in complex communication can also be observed in

economic discourse, especially advertising. In any advertisement, regardless of the target audience – Russian, Kazakh, American, etc., various strategies can be used to manipulate the audience, including creating the illusion of the need for a product or service, distorting facts or attracting famous personalities to promote the product, as well as creating a fictional, but seemingly realistic game scene with actors or fake persons, i.e. staging complex communication.

Staged communication has become a traditional form of advertising since the advent of radio and television. The Austrian Slavist Edgar Hoffmann calls it “secondary advertising communication” [Hoffmann, 1997]. This type of advertising communication is secondary since the main appeal to the recipients of the commercial encouraging them to buy is replaced by communication between the characters in a fictional, but seemingly realistic scene. As a prototype, Hoffmann cites a toothpaste commercial shown on Russian television in the 1990s. A mother takes her daughter to the dentist, who diagnoses a cavity. The following dialog takes place:

(11) Мать: Всего одна дырочка, ничего страшного.

Стоматолог: Всего? Это же кариес. Одна в год, а сколько их будет, когда девочка вырастет? Тем более, что кариес может привести к потере зуба.

Дочь: Но мы же регулярно чистим зубы!?

Стоматолог: Не все пасты одинаковые. Я рекомендую Блендамед с его фтористой системой Флуристат, а лучшей защиты от кариеса не существует [Hoffmann, 1999, pp. 71-72].

Mother: Just one hole, it's nothing. Dentist: Just one? It's a cavity. One in a year, and how many will there be when the girl grows up? Moreover, caries can lead to tooth loss. Daughter: But we brush our teeth regularly!/? Dentist: Not all toothpastes are the same. I recommend Blendamed with its Fluoristat fluoride system, and there is no better protection against tooth decay.

In the next scene, which takes place later, the dental decay is predictably no longer detected because the mother and daughter used the recommended toothpaste. The dentist's statement that the teeth are now healthy is immediately followed by a voice-over, which confirms the advertised brand of toothpaste, which dentists supposedly recommend.

(12) Дочь: У меня ни одной новой дырки.

Стоматолог: Теперь у нас здоровые зубы.

Голос за кадром: Блендамед. Стоматологи свидетельствуют: Лучшей защиты от кариеса не существует [Hoffmann, 1999, pp. 72].

Daughter: I don't have a single new hole. Dentist: Now we have healthy teeth. Voice-over: Blendamed. Dentists testify that there is no better protection against tooth decay.

This kind of commercial has long been on television and the Internet, and the recipients are fully aware that it is staged for advertising purposes and that all the participants are actors, i.e. the alleged dentist is not a dentist in real life. However, this form can be characterized as a certain type of manipulation or an attempt at manipulation. Hoffmann argues that secondary advertising communication reduces the ability of recipients to decode the sender's real intention [Hoffmann, 1999, p. 71].

FoodMaster's advertisement promoting the brand of curdled milk "BIO-C Immun+" is an example of complex staged communication in Kazakh media. The video begins with a conversation between two friends, which we understand to be actresses playing the role of friends:

(13) – Как провели выходные?

– Как обычно, сын приболел. А вы?

– А мы... Начали с БИО-С. Веселились. Гуляли. Удивлялись. То есть как всегда. Попробуйте (Bio-C..., 00:00:01–00:00:14).

– How did you spend your weekend? – As usual, my son is ill. And you? – And we... started with BIO-C. We were having fun. We walked. They were surprised. That is, as always. Try.

After the dialog, a voice-over notes the advantages of this product in the form of the advertising slogan *BIO-C Immun+ – double immunity protection for a bright life for your family*. The commercial ends with a friendly appeal from one of the characters to all consumers: *How did you spend your weekend?* This question reflects the sender's intention – a call to live brightly, which is impossible without the strong immunity provided by the advertised product. In this case, the appeal to the audience is not covert but explicit, and the manipulative trick is that the speaker is staged as an advisor and friend of the audience and, thus, plays the role of a

close person whom the recipient can trust completely.

The intended recipients believe they are simply witnessing a recommendation that turns out to be correct. Formally, therefore, it is a manipulative disguise of the intended addressee. In traditional toothpaste advertisements like the one quoted, this is, undoubtedly, a very mild form of manipulation, but we can observe more serious cases of media manipulation in secondary communication. Consider, for example, the staging of interviews with alleged experts on economic or military issues in order influence the opinions of people who are not directly addressed, but are pushed into the role of witnesses to seemingly reasonable considerations and beliefs.

2. *Involvement of the manipulated in the manipulation*

The methodology for identifying manipulated groups can include data analysis, collecting information about the target audience, using sociological research methods, as well as analyzing content and communication aimed at a particular group (for example, analyzing social networks, online forums, surveys and interviewing focus groups, etc.), machine learning and data analysis to characterize manipulated groups based on training data, including marked-up examples of groups subject to manipulation. However, as noted above, we are interested in the pragmatic side of manipulation and the role of participants in complex communication. It is important to note that targets of media manipulation are not necessarily passive groups if we consider communication participants from the perspective of their activity and passivity. They can actively participate in manipulation by themselves. An impressive literary example illustrating this type of manipulation is the beginning of the famous dystopian novel *We* by Yevgeny Zamyatin written in 1920. The novel, which is set in the future begins with a quote from the *State newspaper*, which publishes an appeal to society to take part in the glorification of the *United State* by submitting creative pieces of writing about their absolute happiness reduced to formulas and equations to be carried by the spaceship *Integral* built to invade and conquer extraterrestrial planets:

(14) Через 120 дней заканчивается постройка ИНТЕГРАЛА. Близок великий, исторический час, когда первый ИНТЕГРАЛ взойдет в мировое пространство. Тысячу лет тому назад ваши героические предки покорили власти Единого Государства весь земной шар. Вам предстоит еще более славный подвиг: стеклянным, электрическим, огнедышащим ИНТЕГРАЛОМ проинтегрировать бесконечное уравнение вселенной. Вам предстоит благодетельному игу разума подчинить неведомые существа, обитающие на иных планетах, – быть может, еще в диком состоянии свободы. Если они не поймут, что мы несем им математически-безошибочное счастье, – наш долг заставить их быть счастливыми. Но прежде оружия – мы испытываем слово.

От имени Благодетеля объявляется всем нумерам Единого Государства:

Всякий, кто чувствует себя в силах, обязан составлять трактаты, поэмы, манифеста, оды или иные сочинения о красоте и величии Единого Государства. Это будет первый груз, который понесет ИНТЕГРАЛ.

Да здравствует Единое Государство, да здравствуют нумера, да здравствует Благодетель! (Zamyatin, 1991).

In another hundred and twenty days the building of the *Integral* will be completed. The great historic hour is near, when the first *Integral* will rise into the limitless space of the universe. One thousand years ago your heroic ancestors subjected the whole earth to the power of the United State. A still more glorious task is before you: the integration of the indefinite equation of the COSMOS by the use of the glass, electric, fire-breathing *Integral*. Your mission is to subjugate to the grateful yoke of reason the unknown beings who live on other planets, and who are perhaps still in the primitive state of freedom. If they will not understand that we are bringing them a mathematically faultless happiness, our duty will be to force them to be happy. But before we take up arms, we shall try the power of words.

In the name of the Well-Doer, the following is announced herewith to all Numbers of the United State: “Whoever feels capable must consider it his duty to write treatises, poems, manifestoes, odes, and other compositions on the greatness and the beauty of the United State.

This will be the first cargo which the *Integral* will carry. “Long live the United State! Long live the Numbers!! Long live the Well-Doer!!!” (Zamiatin, 1924).

In the novel, the *United State* is a giant manipulation machine that suppresses personality, free will, creativity and love, ultimately all human values, and reduces people to the level of machines. Thus, this is the maximum degree of

manipulation. All those who have hitherto lived outside the world dominated by totalitarianism must now accept it. The means to achieve this acceptance are both military force and propaganda: “But before we take up arms, we shall try the power of words.” The readers of the *State newspaper* are no longer people, but only numbers, but now they are called upon to actively participate in the propaganda of their instrument of oppression in poems, treatises, etc. In this way, they themselves become manipulators and actively strengthen the effect of manipulation to which they are subjected.

Today, due to the ease of sharing and spreading disinformation, conspiracy theories, and state and non-state propaganda, manipulation has become deeply ingrained in modern society. As a result, people who create information bubbles often find themselves trapped in them. The information bubble looks like an ecosystem of familiar and user-friendly applications, selected platforms and information sources, websites, and pages on social networks. However, social media provides a way to express disagreement. In this way, it is quite easy to identify information bubbles designed to manipulate information as they do not contain contradictions or disagreements. A good example of this is the comments on the public dispute between Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and Alla Pugacheva, which was already discussed above. After this public clash, the comments for and against Zhirinovskiy and for and against Alla Pugacheva were very different. YouTube viewers can still watch the dispute, which is still attracting attention today, as new comments are being posted all the time. Now, the comments always take a negative stance against Pugacheva and in favor of Zhirinovskiy:

(15) @user-qn4tq1yp5j – Жириновский был во всём прав каждое слово

@michaelshell8897 – «У нее закон один – менять мужей каждые пять минут!» Молодец, Владимир Вольфович, всё по делу сказал!

@user-pt6ip1jg9v – 2023 год, время всё расставило по своим местам. Где сейчас Жириновский, вечная память выдающемуся политику, и куда уехали другие патриоты из этой программы...

@user-fy9kl1vx4t – Где сейчас Прохоров? Я о нем ничего не слышала после этих выборов. Пугачёва понятно где и с кем. Вечная память великому политику В.В. Жириновскому!

@Kat_kosti – Пугачева еще тогда показала свое лицо!!!! Жириновскому вечная память!!! Светлая память!!!

@user-sc8sd9cy3t62bn – Поклон и Слава Владимиру Вольфовичу!!! Помним, любим, не забудим никогда!!! Хороший отпор дал Пугачихе, что бы не забывалась и знала свое место – только на сцене!!! Молодец!!!

@nizaketbabaeva6471 – Теперь все поняли кто гордость а кто позор народа!

@user-ne6pp3xi6b – Да , как прав был Жириновский!!! время показало кто есть кто!!

@user-zb6hp3dr5z – Время показало, кто «позор страны», которая предала народ и сбежала в такое непростое для страны время, а кого оплакивал народ и до сих пор смотрит все его видео в интернете. Светлая память.

@user-qn4tq1yp5j – Zhirinovsky was right about everything, every word. @michaelshell8897 – “She has one law – to change husbands every five minutes!” Well done, Vladimir Volfovich, he said everything to the point! @user-pt6ip1jg9v – 2023, time has put everything in its place. Where is Zhirinovsky now, eternal memory of an outstanding politician, and where have other patriots from this program gone...

@user-fy9kl1vx4t – Where is Prokhorov now? I haven't heard from him since this election. Pugachev is clear where and with whom. Eternal memory to the great politician V.V. Zhirinovsky! @Kat_kosti – Pugacheva showed her face back then!!!! Eternal memory to Zhirinovsky!!! Bright memory!!! @user-sc8sd9cy3t62bn – Bow and Glory to Vladimir Volfovich!!! We remember, we love, we will never forget!!! He gave a good rebuff to Pugachikha, so that she would not forget and know her place – only on stage !!! Well done!!!

@nizaketbabaeva6471 – Now everyone understands who is the pride and who is the shame of the people!

@user-ne6pp3xi6b – Yes, how right Zhirinovsky was!!! Time has shown who is who!! @user-

zb6hp3dr5z – Time has shown who is the “shame of the country”, who betrayed the people and fled at such a difficult time for the country, and who was mourned by the people and still watches all his videos on the Internet. Bright memory.

Even the few examples where there are no longer opposing opinions show that the comments serve the purpose of propaganda. The created opinion bubble is reminiscent of the novel *We* by Zamaytin. Today, it is not entirely clear whether many people sing along with this choir or whether these are artificially generated texts. However, the one-sidedness of the commentary allows any user to understand that this is not an opinion, but a large-scale attempt at manipulation.

3. Manipulation and responsibility

Undoubtedly, an important issue to date is the reliability of information in the media and the responsibility for its credibility. The assessment of reliability depends on many factors, including independence, professionalism, ethics, access to resources and technology, and the political and economic interests of the audience. We live in a digital age where information is constantly updated, and therefore the possibilities for manipulating opinions and shaping behavior are constantly expanding through traditional and new social media. This situation can reinforce the view that media users are largely passive objects of manipulation. Media users cannot always accurately determine whether comments and other texts on the Internet come from real people or are artificially generated, and whether complex communication for manipulative purposes is staged or still genuine and sincere. However, manipulation should not exempt media users of their responsibility and they can ask themselves self-critical questions to protect themselves against manipulation, namely:

To whom is the communication directed?

What effect do I create by participating in certain public formats on social networks? Where do I increase my attempts at manipulation?

When I recognize information bubbles by their one-sidedness, do I want to refuse to participate in the communication, or do I feel comfortable in a bubble, even when I know its content is lies? Why does this happen, and how can I avoid participating in destructive communication?

Conclusion

In the modern information age, media manipulation is crucial in shaping public opinion. However, the term ‘manipulation’ is often used in a limited way to refer only to one-sided forms of influence. The sender uses fake news, one-sided information, false evaluations of people and facts, including the use of euphemisms or dysphemisms, personality cults, or hate speech to overvalue the self or devalue others, etc., in order to influence the audience. In this simple model of communication, the recipients appear passive. They are only the object of manipulation, not participants in the communication. In reality,

however, communication is usually complex, i.e., it is multi-addressed and can have multiple senders simultaneously. Typical media formats are talk shows and commercials with staged communication, but also communication in social networks, the use of comment functions on the Internet, etc. In our opinion, complex communication should receive more attention in the future when it comes to questions of media manipulation. Therefore, in this article we have focused specifically on media manipulation in complex communication situations.

In complex communication, the sender and receiver cannot always be clearly identified, because they can change all the time. When talk show guests talk to each other, the actual recipients of the communication are often viewers who are not directly involved in the discussion. The same is true of commercials, where actors communicate with each other, but the advertising message is directed at the audience. Media literacy therefore includes the ability to correctly identify the addressee and to see through possible indirect attempts at manipulation. However, media users are also directly involved in media communication when they express themselves in social networks, refer to each other in comment functions, and so on. Since this communication is public, it is also a complex communication. Media users communicate with each other, but their messages are also addressed to recipients who read them without directly participating in the communication. This means that there is intentional or unintentional multiple addressing. Information bubbles that arise during these processes of complex communication make the audience more vulnerable to manipulation. To make matters worse, forms of communication on social networks or in Internet comments can now be artificially generated (bots). This makes it necessary to consume media with great vigilance and to participate in media communication very responsibly.

The fact of mass manipulation increases the responsibility of the recipient in the media world. In this regard, it is essential to develop media literacy and critical thinking to help media recipients distinguish and analyze information, recognize the mechanisms of manipulation, especially in complex media communication, and understand their own responsibility as well as seemingly passive recipients, and as active

participants when using social networks, commentaries and other forms of media communication. Responsibility can be trained through self-critical questions such as “What effect do I create by participating in some certain public formats on social networks?”

NOTE

¹ This research was funded by the Committee on Science of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan (grant No. AP19679821 “Development of a technique for recognizing media manipulation and promoting media literacy in the information space”).

Material and analyses, which are presented here, are partially published: Kusse H., Shakenova M.T. Media Manipulation and Complex Communication in Advertising and Talk Shows. *World of Russian-Speaking Countries*, 2024, № 2 (20), pp. 54-73. (In Russian). DOI: 10.20323/2658-7866-2024-2-20-54

² Here and below the translation is ours, unless otherwise stated.

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