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The Effects of Mass-Media on Social Behavior, Emotions and Cognitions

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Abstract: Mass-media affects its consumers primarily in their cognitive dimension, by changing the image of the world - in this sense that the media becoms a vector of social influence, by changing the cognitions of individuals - but also by changing the shared social constructs within membership groups. The stated role of the media is to inform target audiences about events of interest in the field specific to the activity of the media trust, but also to convey opinions, ideas and views on those events in a way that is as complete and as complex as possible, allowing recipients to build their own opinions or adhere to one or another of the opinions expressed. This article deals with the ethics of mass communication when faced with a window of opportunity which allows an easier promotion of ideas or interests, taking into account the theory of life as a spectale promoted by Erwin Goffman.

Keywords: *Mass-media, social behavior, emotions, cognitions, mass communication.*

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1. Introduction

In the process of informing the public, but also in performing other communicative functions, the media appeals to the emotional side of the receiver, either in order to influence the reception of the message and post-reception behaviors, or directly - in order to obtain a positive emotional effect, which would arouse the good mood of the receiver. Receiving information from the media but also the construction of emotions are social acts (Pavel, 2016), due to their origin. Even if we speak of an indirect communication, through the media, this is still an intentional social communication, whereas the sender chooses his message in order to obtain an expected social result (Sandache, 2016), chooses the best channels for transmitting the message (by printed media, or by audio-visual or digital media) depending on the targeted audiences and the specifics of their media consumption, and generally expects feedback - even if not in a direct manner, which is possible only in the case of digital media - but primarily as a behavioral effect. The coding of the message, specific for each type of media, is also socially mediated and aims to obtain the best social effects for the direct purpose of influencing the target audiences.

An example of communicative discrediting of a topic is currently the discrediting of scientific knowledge and of "science as a tool of power" (Focault, 1995), the excessive media coverage of plagiarism and, in general, of the violation of ethics in education and research, together with the illegitimate extension to the whole professional body of teachers of allegations implying the violation of professional ethics, issues that ultimately lead to a widespread distrust in science. This mistrust is perpetuated by negative examples that are more to common in the media about the side effects of therapies, vaccines or other public health policies. This currently leads to an extremely low acceptability of anti-Covid vaccination among the population bombarded by the media - especially the non-traditional media - with alarming news about the negative effects of the vaccine which, real or false, call into question the legitimacy of the public policy on vaccination, especially in the current context of the ineffective communication of official institutions called upon to 'strategically communicate' the current public health situation.

2. The overton window and mass communication

Joseph Overton speaks of windows of opportunity for public policy (Talbot, 2019), in the sense of opening them to social acceptability, but the process can be viewed in the opposite direction, in the sense of discarding

values that were once the basis of European society - for example, religious values, undermined both by the policy of social distancing and by the campaign of fakse news and the increase of public hatred (Paz et al., 2020) against the background of widespread fears and situations of poor communication, in crisis situations, of some institutional actors. In the sense of opening a window of opportunity for the public agenda or closing it for public communication - and implicitly for the social acceptability of that communication phenomenon - the media acts as a catalyst for public communication, being a vector of information or misinformation, as the case may be.

The social learning of a behavior - of vaccination or wearing a mask - can generate a deconstruction of freedom, in the sense that a window of opportunity is generated – an overton window (Greer et al., 2018; Talbot, 2019; Lehman, 2020) - on the social acceptability of the restriction of liberty, the reason invoked being the public interest. In fact, the current pandemic opens many windows of opportunity regarding the virtualization of social space, the deconstruction of social solidarity, social distancing, which replaces sociability, the renunciation to the freedom of expression, opinion, conscience. The overtone window represents a moment of opportunity for a public policy to be promoted, which is created in the context of the process of obtaining consensus and, respectively, of the interpretive adrift of a public policy theme (Sandu, 2020). The restriction of civil liberties would have been absolutely unacceptable in a democratic state, had it not been for the current epidemiological context, which deconstructed the universality of individual claims to freedom in favor of public safety. The social acceptability of the restriction of individual freedoms and human rights opens a window of opportunity for authoritarian practices that take place in special situations, such as the state of emergency, and which may continue under the same public security needs, after the end of the state of emergency and the decree of a state of alert state or any other such political emergency state (Sandu, 2020, p. 293).

3. Erving Goffman on "life as a spectacle"

Sociologist Erving Goffman emphasized on the idea of "life as a spectacle" (Goffman, 2009), arguing that ordinary people in everyday life act to form desired impressions of those around them, as actors play roles on a stage, in front of spectators. The resemblance between impression management and acting (Goffman, 2010) (in which actors claim to be what they are really not) shows the intentional and duplicitous nature of the

former. Older research has confirmed this, while more recent observations and research show that there are cases when people engage in impression management without being aware of it. Practicing impression management favors the development of social relationships, however, impression management is not without risks. Excessive concern about how others think about you can cause anxiety and hence health problems. Practicing forms of impression management that aim to induce opinions totally contrary to the way the individual actually is (which aim to deceive the audience) runs the risk that those around them to see the "acting game" and thus the actor is exposed. On the other hand, impression management could become "too efficient."

Impression management can be used in social life for the benefit of friends. People usually describe their friends in such a way that they support the self-images their friends want. That is why impression management can be used to influence others and is oriented towards the others, thus becoming a central component of everyday social life. People form impressions about others and create impressions about themselves to others at the same time (Picone, 2015). The purpose of impression management is to create a certain identity that allows to obtain certain results within the social interaction (not necessarily an identity and positive results).

Impression management is the basis of the success of social relations. Anticipating the needs and requirements of those around us helps us to create appropriate behaviors, to make friends, to cope with public dignities etc.

As social psychology matured as a discipline, it proposed an increasingly dynamic and complex view on human behavior.

Nowadays, the idea that people do not react passively to environmental stimuli has become an axiom; they try to structure, to shape the environment in which they live, they try to build a less threatening environment. Social intelligence is considered a very important constituent of intelligence and is closely related to the status and success of the individual in everyday life.

In general, the impression management is put into service when trying to amplify the power of the actor within social relations, making their participation in social life less resourse consumming (more profitable). There are many studies that show that people present themselves to others in such a way that they can achieve the desired results from social interaction. Impression management can be a conscious, controlled activity, a calculated behavior or, on the contrary, an automatic activity. Controlled self-immaging

occurs especially when performance is very important to the actor or when the actor encounters or anticipates obstacles to desirable identifications.

Impression management in organizations is classified according to the objectives they aim at, as follows:

- tactical - which aims at short-term goals (for example, an organization aims to form a good impression on its customers immediately, on the spot);
- strategic - which aims at long-term goals, using self-centered techniques, aiming to promote personal image.

In order to achieve the objectives of creating a good image in front of others, impression management uses a series of tactics that can be classified into:

- direct impression management tactics - techniques used to present information about their own characteristics, abilities, talents;
- indirect impression management practices - techniques used to enhance or protect one's own image by managing information (Sandu, 2019).

New media are favorite tools for impression management, through the virtual environment that allows the display of self-images that supports our transformation into avatars, and we consider this process of the avatarization of self-discourse as a virtualization of social space from a communicative perspective.

4. Conclusions

The effects of mass-media are not always what the initiator of the communication wants, and perverse effects of communication can occur - for example in the case of excessive media coverage of an event or a person, that creates public disinterest in that topic. Of course, excessive communication (Habermas, 1985) of a topic can also be a communicative strategy (Frunză, 2011), to withdraw the topic from the public agenda. In this sense, contradictory rumors and the creation of a "communicative noise" affect the reception of an event by contaminating the public with fake news and making it difficult for the receiver to select the appropriate message.

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