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**ARTICLE HEADLINES AS A MEANS OF MANIPULATION IN  
ONLINE MEDIA**

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***Abstract***

The article examines the issue of both the nature of manipulation in the online media and the means of influencing readers through headlines. Mostly, the media manipulation system is viewed through communication. The study begins with the difference between a communication society and an information society and how this affects such basic actions as the creation, storage, modification and sending of information from the sender to the receiver. More complex and detailed processes are embedded in communication models which are usually divided into linear and circular communication models. Among the latter, the O. Rosenstock-Huussy model stands out, since it lacks components of the sender and the receiver, while the main action is not to "speak", but to "listen" in order to continue the communication process. An analogy is drawn between the model of O. Rosenstock-Huussy and Internet news, where a reader's response "continues" in the form of likes/dislikes, comments and clicks. Based on this, such concepts as clickbait and self-communication can be found in the field of Internet media. In the same way, the O. Rosenstock-Huussy model is used as a prism to examine the relationship between the headline and the news article, with the reader as intermediary. However, in this case, there is a disruption in communication due to the defeat of the expectancy effect used to manipulate the readers. The main conclusion was that defeated expectancy titles are created specifically to attract reader attention. In this way, the readers are affected in a manipulative way.

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**Keywords:** Manipulation, society, communication, deadline, deceived expectations.



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## 1. Introduction

Information is characterised by such actions as its creation, storage, processing and sending. The information society is the group of people involved in the above processes. In recent studies aimed at the study of communication, the concept of modern society as an information society has been subjected to critical analysis. In particular, Goykhman (2014), the author of many textbooks on communications activity, articulated the hypothesis of a "communicative society as a way for people to act jointly" (p. 4). In such a society, information is regarded as a means of accelerating social development. Goykhman, (2014), writes that "modern society is in the fifth stage of a communication revolution that has generated a communication society. The stages of development of this society are closely related to the processes of Internet communications" (p.4). Observations of communication in the Internet space and the emergence of new genres and transformation of well-known genres, as well as textual analysis, not only support the hypothesis that Goykhman expressed in 2014, but also point to new facts and evidence of the formation of a new kind of society – a communication society.

The growing role of the communicative factor is confirmed by the lexical studies. For example, studying the structure of lexical semantics, Rudakova and Sternin (2017), introduced the concept of the communicative meaning of a word, which is defined as "a generalisation of various sets of actualised semes, meanings fixed in contexts" (p.36). Using the capabilities of the National corpus of the Russian language, with the help of communicative-semantic analysis, I. Sternin and his students undertook to describe the seme, thereby updating the meaning of lexemes in different communication situations and allowing us to identify common and uncommon, new and obsolete meanings, nonce usage and a seme-like variation in the described lexeme in modern contexts. In other words, communicative semantic analysis allows us to represent the whole range of meanings and the possibility of their variation in modern linguistic consciousness.

## 2. Problem Statement

Observing the processes in the Media Space, analysing the presence and transformation of traditional publicistic genres, as well as the emergence of new directions, the authors of this article set out, on the one hand, to consider the reasons for readers' disappointment with Internet media texts, as expressed in their comments, and, on the other hand, to identify the motives of editors and journalists using the tactics of "defeated expectancy", which is regarded as a manipulative technology. It is important to note that this tactic is used by the media to attract the attention of readers in order to increase ratings or to increase the rate of website or news portal traffic.

The study adheres to a communicative approach for studying reader's perceptions of publicistic texts in the Internet media.

### 3. Research Questions

#### 3.1. Man in the information society and communication models

To understand human behaviour in the new conditions of Internet communications, it is necessary to analyse communication models and different theoretical approaches to understanding them. Traditionally, the scientific and academic literature has referred to the communication models presented in the works of G. Lasswell, K. Shannon, W. Weaver, K. Bühler, R. Jacobson, W. Schramm.

The development of basic communication models is associated with the study of mass communications for marketing purposes, as commercial companies need to consider consumers' behaviour in response to a variety of advertising actions, as well as the effectiveness of advertising and PR campaigns. That is how the first linear model of communication appeared, suggested by Lasswell (1948). After it, the Shannon-Weaver model of communication immediately came to light, which included the "noise" component. Shannon (1949) wrote: "This component prevented the recipient from receiving complete and/or undistorted information" (p.89).

The German scientist Bühler (2011) developed the Organon model, which is based on such linguistic functions as the expressive function, the representative function and the conative function. The linguistic communication model of Jakobson (1975), based on the "Organon model", includes six components (sender, receiver, message, channel, context and code), correlates with the basic functions of language and is successfully used in linguistics, sociolinguistics and the sociology of mass communications.

The Osgood-Schramm model of communication is fundamentally different from the previous linear models and represents communication as a continuous process. Schramm (1954) adapted this model and added the notion of field of experience, or commonality, to the mix. We do not analyse these models in detail, as they are replicated in many scientific and educational publications, but we thoroughly examine a less-discussed model of communication that is significantly different from the above – the one developed in the middle of the 20th century by Rosenstock-Huessy (2008). An outstanding thinker and philosopher of language, he suggested a model lacking such mandatory components as a sender and a receiver and without a communicative act closed in on itself, instead offering a diagram of an open process consisting of four stages: listen - speak - continue - coordinate.

We apply the Rosenstock-Huessy scheme to Internet communication, where communication is an absolutely open and multidirectional dialogue, often with an abstract receiver, presented by some community of readers and subscribers. According to Rosenstock-Huessy (2008), speech communication begins with the action of "listening". In this act, the participant must listen to himself in order to prevent mistakes during the conversation. "Until you understand yourself, you definitely will not understand others" (p.116). The second stage is the action of "saying". But in this model, this is not the main component, but rather an intermediate one, because it is necessary to say not in order to cause the receiver to do something or to respond to us, but in order for him to continue our discussion. If the sender says something that is important and interesting to the recipient, then the recipient will continue the dialogue. Therefore, the third step is the action "continue". In the Internet space, this is reflected in comments, likes, reposts; i.e., it will elicit a certain reaction from readers. The final and fourth stage is the "consent", which covers the three previous ones, as a result of which the circular model is obtained. At this stage, it

is necessary to find something in common that will allow all participants in the communication to come to an agreement and create a "collective subject". This is the process of communication, as represented by O. Rosenstock-Huessy. None of these scientists foresaw what the process of communication would be like in the modern era of digital and new technologies – for example, virtual and augmented reality. In our opinion, the model of O. Rosenstock-Huessy, in particular, can help to objectively describe the process of communication in the Internet environment.

### **3.2. People in the Internet society (community)**

Information and communication technologies are all around us. Every day we are among gadgets, smartphones with constant online access. A modern person spends a lot of time in the virtual world, starting out by viewing messages or weather forecasts on a smartphone early in the morning; carrying out work-related activity, obtaining information from Internet sources; relaxing by watching movies, reading books, listening to music or playing games on the corresponding Internet portals.

Online communities have been the subject of many scientific publications. For example, Booth (2016) actively addressed the problems of culture and computers, Floridi (2015) studied human behaviour in hyperspace. Of particular note is the research carried out by such scientists as Konow-Lund and Olsson (2017), who created the famous work "Social Media's Challenge to Journalistic Norms and Values during a Terror Attack". This book considers a process whereby ordinary citizens, the users of social networks, become not only consumers, but also producers, of the news. For example, after the terrorist attacks in Norway in 2011, users shared their impressions and grief, which attracted the world media to their stories posted on the Internet. Continuing the theme of social networks, one cannot fail to mention Lewis and Molyneux (2018), a scientist who considered online journalism issues that have been so popular recently.

Scientists from various countries are attempting to understand the behaviour and self-awareness of people in the new communication conditions of virtual interaction. Analysis shows that the Internet, first, as an interactive platform, allows a person to be not only a consumer of information, but also a kind of co-author, supplementing, evaluating, and expressing his own point of view through comments. Boguslavskaya and Boguslavskiy (2019) write that "from a passive consumer of traditional media materials, the Internet user becomes an active participant, acquiring new content consumption habits" (p.209). Second, the Internet has created the phenomenon of the widespread use of fake news. Kiklewich (2019) writes: "In mass communication, this phenomenon is known as fake news, pseudo-events, pseudo-experts, etc." (p.246). Third, the Internet facilitated the involvement of a wide and heterogeneous audience in what M. Castells calls "the sphere of mass self-communication" (Castells, 2007, p.238). Polish scientist Wiktor (2013) explains it this way: "Examples of this include the feedback phenomenon through such discourses as Internet commentary, forums (discussion group), blogs, fan pages (in social media), networks, email, and communicator" (p.6).

A circular model of self-communication leads to the results that Kiklewich (2019) points out: "thanks to the Internet, [... there is now a] sphere of mass self-communication, which combines elements of mass, public communication and elements of interpersonal, informal communication" (p.7).

Rezaev and Tregubova (2019) indicate that in common usage ("usus"), the lexemes "conversation" and "communication" are often used interchangeably as synonyms. But their studies and observations

allow us to insist that the development of modern technology dictates the need for a fundamental distinction between conversation and communication. Researchers come to the conclusion that there is a conceptual difference between the concepts of "conversation" and "communication".

### **3.3. Manipulative technologies in the Internet media**

The next research task is to analyse the tactics of "defeated expectancy" as a manipulative technology in Internet media texts using the online newspaper lenta.ru and the Yandex Zen platform as examples. The headings of journalistic texts were repeatedly described in the scientific literature: types of headings and heading groups were analysed and categorised; functions were defined and the use of metaphors, precedent phenomena, concepts, language game techniques, etc., were studied. But most of the research was done using headlines from print media or television and radio broadcasts. We offer one more direction for studying the headline as a means of manipulation in choosing the source of information on the Internet. The number of views, likes and the rate of readability of texts determine the statistic and various types of ratings, "which are important indicators of the effectiveness of the media, which in turn directly affects economic indicators (profit, financing)" (Bugaeva, 2019, p.40). The desire to increase web page traffic by any means, even to the detriment of the accuracy and veracity of information, especially on Yandex Zen platforms, led to the emergence of the term clickbait. This term describes content that is designed to manipulate the reader into clicking on the recommended resource (Frampton, 2015). Journalists and editors producing such materials deliberately distort the meaning of the headline, exaggerate the facts or value of the event, conceal information or provide secondary information as if it were key material. It is difficult for an ordinary reader to distinguish a clickbait headline from a familiar, informative one.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to describe Internet media headlines as special communicative units, the main function of which is to manipulate the reader's choice – a pragmatic approach to increasing the quantitative indicators of website visits and the readability of the text.

## **5. Research Methods**

The main method used in this study is to analyse the text, comparing the implicit information in the heading group with the basic and additional content in the main body of the text.

## **6. Findings**

Having considered examples in which the content of the article does not meet the expectations of the reader after reading the title, the authors came to the conclusion that the title, which had previously performed the main function of attracting readers, starts to perform a manipulative function. After acquaintance with the headline, the reader, thanks to available background knowledge, develops some

idea of the content of the article and its main theme. Further reading is disappointing, since the text does not meet expectations because it is only indirectly related to the topic stated in the title.

The sources of such titles are mainly the so-called "Conspiracy Theories". Headings suggest that the article will expose and disclose secrets or riddles. If we turn to the famous conspiracy theories, we can find quite striking examples of such titles in the media. For example, a lot of headlines refer to the "Secret Moon Base Conspiracy": "*The USA never landed on the moon. Irrefutable evidence*"; "*The Americans were definitely not on the moon. The evidence is the quite damaging*"; "*Didn't the Americans fly to the moon? That's how it was ...*". When reading the contents of the material under such headings, the reader will only find such indirect arguments as changes to the US flag on the surface of the moon, and the black background without stars. The latest news on this subject was WikiLeaks' published video materials under such titles as "*Exposing the Flight to the Moon*" in revenge for the arrest of Julian Assange. Such things, cloaked in mystery and then later "exposed", can give rise to a whole category of "news". For example, a very common news item is an article about the alleged discovery of the body of Sergei Bodrov, who died with a film crew in the Karmadon Gorge during a glacier descent in 2002: "*The body of Sergei Bodrov was found in the Karmadon Gorge*"; "*Body of Sergei Bodrov found: true or not?*"; "*The body of Sergei Bodrov may have been found in North Ossetia*". Show business also has a lot of headlines with defeated expectations, but this is mainly used for world-famous people: "*Jackie Chan dead 2019*".

Let us analyse a text entitled Vasily Lanovoi: "*The loss of a beloved woman and the actor's new love*". Modern readers know that for almost fifty years the actor has been married to I. Kupchenko, which is implicit information. Such a title involuntarily causes concern, and the question arises: what happened to the beloved actress? In light of the latest scandals and divorce proceedings in actors' families, which are widely and thoroughly covered in various media, such a headline does not induce one to prepare for a positive article, but instead is alarming. In fact, the text focuses on the history of V. Lanovoy's three marriages. The article contains no news. His second wife, T. Zyablikova, died tragically, and I. Kupchenko became his new sweetheart in 1972. Readers' first reaction can be described as follows: "*Thank God, Irina Kupchenko is alive*". Then the question arises, so what is the article about? The headline's only purpose is to attract the attention of readers and fans of the famous actor; the article does not serve any information function.

The second example is an article entitled "*Zelensky declared that Dunkirk was captured by Ukrainian Cossacks*". Many young readers will involuntarily get the impression that the Ukrainian army undertook some kind of military operation. In fact, this is a kind of peculiar rewriting or politically biased interpretation of history. Dunkirk is a French fortress, which, according to the President of Ukraine, V. Zelensky, was captured by Cossacks led by Bogdan Khmelnytsky. Ukrainian President V. Zelensky stated during the country's Independence Day celebrations that it's not quite right to say that Ukraine is only 28 years old. Trying to move the chronological boundaries on the emergence of Ukrainian statehood, V. Zelensky, as a proof of his hypothesis, gave an example of how the Cossacks, helping the French, took Dunkirk fortress in the 17th century. This is an example of how a news headline can be used to convey a biased interpretation of historical events and a shift in timelines.

The next heading, "*Big Chinese Brother*", makes it clear that the article will focus on China, a country with a huge population. In fact, the article talks about how China is developing a system of total

control over the population and establishing a digital dictatorship. Smart-city technologies are rapidly developing in China and special barcodes and radio frequency identification tags (RFID tags) are being installed everywhere. Using these technologies, the country has created a social rating system built around the network principle. This system has become part of the total surveillance program and is referred to as "Big Brother".

The majority of readers were perplexed by the headline "*Russia attacked the Turkish military in Syria*". Everybody knows that recently, mutually beneficial relations have developed between Russia and Turkey. The presidents of both countries have met repeatedly, most recently at the Air Show in Moscow in 2019. The main disagreements of recent years have been resolved and trade and tourism ties have been restored. This implicit information is totally contradicted by the headline, which leads one to conclude that "the Russian military attacked Turkish troops". Such an aggressive statement raises concerns and a desire to find out what really happened. Upon reading the article, you discover that groups of militants and anti-government Syrian forces are hiding behind Turkish observation posts. Russian planes attacked sites where militants gather, not Turkish observation posts. Such a distortion of factual material is perplexing and may lead to international misunderstandings and diplomatic conflicts.

Thus, the two main structural elements in the media text may be related as follows:

- full correlation (correlation and dependence);
- partial correlation;
- paradoxical correlation caused by the use of defeated expectancy tactics.

The communicative meaning of the heading can be described using communicative-semantic analysis and comparing the implicit information of the heading group with the primary theme of the main text.

Traditionally, the title of the article was supposed to describe the current thematic focus while expressing the author's intention; therefore, the reader expects the theme and motive to be projected onto the subsequent content of the article, drawing a direct line between the theme indicated in the title and the body of the article. But such expectations are not always met, and the effect of defeated expectations arises. Vepreva (2016) described this phenomenon as it relates to tabloid-type online journalism: "Tabloids publish materials, usually of scandalous content, relating to the private lives of celebrities. The main content of the yellow press is sensations, gossip and scandals from the personal lives of famous people" (p.81).

In traditional media, reader attention was attracted mainly with the help of stylistic tools and language games (Bugaeva & Sidorchenko, 2019). With the advent of the Yandex Zen platform, the number of texts with inconsistencies or partial correspondences of the subject title and the main text has increased significantly, which begins to cause readers to distrust this source of information, in particular, and news portals in general. This leads to "discursive diversion", which Shipunova (2016) defines as "the overturning and reformatting of the traditional semantic field in individual and mass consciousness" (p.194).

Moreover, the modern reader does not want just to be informed; he prefers to be a participant – if not in the events themselves, then at least in discussions of them – and an active user of information, which manifests itself in writing comments and evaluating publications through likes and dislikes.

Therefore, the main characteristics of the communicative process on the Internet are "autonomy, variability, virtuality and interactivity" (Bespalova, 2017, p.197).

## 7. Conclusion

The headings of any texts should be considered as special communication units whose main function is to attract the attention of the target audience. In Internet media, the headline acquires the manipulative function of communicative influence. The importance of implicit information and background knowledge for evaluating headlines is reduced. When analysing headlines, it is advisable to highlight a criterion such as communicative effectiveness. The new information and communication technologies that are rapidly spreading into people's everyday lives are giving rise to a new model of the world – one focused on communication.

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