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MASS MEDIA AND PUBLIC RELATIONS: PROBLEMS OF INFORMATION OVERLOAD IN MODERN SOCIETY

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Abstract

The modern society cannot be imagined without mass media, which influence has increased since the end of the 20th century. Media participation is becoming global, and people's perception of reality depends on the mass media, which actively interfere into our lives in all spheres. The evolution of media is a revealed regularity. But authors express concern that current communication consists not only in the information circulation, but in the exchange of opinions, judgments, and behavior patterns of the audience. They see the transformation of media from a factor of production and dissemination of information into a factor of organization of the mass communication process, which influences the social behavior patterns. The aim is to explore the information overload as a consequence of the transformation of mass media into the tool of imposing interpreted information onto the target audience in the interests of different actors, seeking to use accessibility and high speed of information transfer. Authors conclude that information overload leads to the loss of the "sense of reality". People demonstrate an objective inability to make the right decision. There is a lot of confusion and fear for children who are also under the "pressure" of aggressive information, which manipulate moral attitudes of the population to form their world view via mass media. This is a complex and ambiguous problem, as human life is being moved to a symbolic space where, in the pursuit of profit or political dividends, media becomes a powerful means of controlling human consciousness and subconscious.

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1. Introduction

The media culture and policies of influence on people's worldview are so interlinked that they are now virtually inseparable. Mass media benefit from serving population and politics, in turn, public relations benefit from being presented in the mass media. But modern scientific research exploring how the mass media exposure has increased the information onslaught on society is not enough for society to pay attention to the problem. Thus, in the early 1970-s Toffler (2002) in his work "Future shock" operates the term "information overload" and draws attention to the causes of it in society.

Twenty years later scientists studied more closely the situation when a person got lost because of the excess of necessary and unnecessary information and stressed by his/her inability to adequately perceive the entire incoming flow of knowledge, to separate the useful information from unnecessary one, etc. The terms "information fatigue syndrome" (Lewis, 1999) and "information stress" (Bodrov, 2000), "information anxiety" (Wurman, 2012), "infoxication" (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2014) and "informational obesity" (infobesity) (Rogers et al., 2013) appear. They indicate a situation when a person trusts advertising, and an excessive amount of information pressures his consciousness and subconscious.

2. Problem Statement

The contemporary authors of the textbook "Advertising: Principles and Practice" Wells et al. (2003) have studied the measurement of advertising effectiveness. Their conclusion is that society is immersed in advertising and advertising sometimes damages the calm of large masses of people. In particular, their study examined the effectiveness of emotional appeals in advertising and how different segments respond to such strategies.

The authors analyzed successful advertising by focusing on EFFIE-award winners: advertising campaigns that won awards for their effectiveness from the American Marketing Association of New York. These EFFIE-award winners reveal the winners' goals in advertising and how those goals are achieved

Thus, drawing the attention of the scientific community to the problems of great information overload, connected with the phenomenon of the global influence of mass media, becomes extremely urgent.

3. Research Questions

The evolution of media is a revealed regularity. But we express concern that current communication consists not only in the information circulation, but in the exchange of opinions, judgments, and behavior patterns of the audience. We see the transformation of media from a factor of production and dissemination of information into a factor of organization of the mass communication process, which influences the social behavior patterns.

4. Purpose of the Study

In this regard, the main purpose of the research is to reveal the content of the information overload concept in modern science. To achieve this goal it is necessary to implement the following main tasks:

- to determine the features of media reality constructing in a globalizing world;
- to formulate the authors' definition of the information overload and identify the processes that cause media activation in the modern information space.

5. Research Methods

The methodological basis of the research is formed with analytical tools that are well-known and recognized in political science. First of all, they are research methods and methods of systemic and structural-functional analysis; comparative assessments based on the categories of identity and difference, in order to identify similar, identical or different characteristics of the studied processes; historical characteristics: synchronous, involving the study of phenomena in the context of the historical situation; chronological, aimed at consistent consideration of historical events; diachronic, focused on periodization and historical parallels, historical modeling in relation to social processes.

To understand the phenomenon of information overload the following methods, models, approaches and concepts are used: the model of two-step propagation of political communication through the media developed by Lazarsfeld et al. (1968); methods of conducting propaganda in the information field of the enemy, proposed by Lasswell (2013); the concept of "narcotization" of the audience through media reports by Lippman (2016), which leads to the emergence of pseudo-reality; studies by Baudrillard (2006), in which media are viewed in the context of "virtual reality", "hyperreality", "simulacrum"; an approach to media research by Luhmann (2000), which is based on the idea of the relationship between the media and political systems.

The representatives of the Frankfurt School introduced the methodological basis of critical realism, which we use for understanding of everyday life and the facts that influence its formation. Thus, the proponent of the critical realism Fromm (1994) convincingly proves that political manipulation pushes a person away from the possibility of creating a complete picture of the world, replacing it with abstract pictures of biased facts.

The method of critical realism, which Marcuse (2002) implemented, allowed to make an assumption that the governing authorities construct a one-dimensional vision of the world since the formation of artificial human needs and the desire to influence the consciousness of certain people and groups is an integral part of the ideological space.

The established methodological foundations make it possible to more clearly identify the models and factors proving the existence of a link between media and information overload. But the theory of mass society, as well as the methodological basis of critical realism, still do not give an answer as they are not aimed at full disclosing the content of massive information attack that people experience; they do not analyze the process of creating media reality under the conditions of the modern society development.

6. Findings

In modern society, mass audiences perceive reality through virtual images and representations that often have nothing to do with the objective reality. The term "reality" has Latin roots ("realis") and means "valid, material". Reality is usually understood as "now" (relevant) and "then" (potential) reality. The world

of artificial images that form media space separates a person's personality from the reality, and the more he delves into the designed world, the less he/she is self-contained. The more he succumbs to the dominant images of need, the more he moves away from his own existence and desires.

According to Baudrillard (2006), the postmodern-era society of mass media monopolically uses simulations representing objects and discourses that have no real reference and do not relate to reality. They relate to "necessary" signs to the subject of the information, turning the world into an iconic, virtual reality. To refer to the logic of the influence of mass media on human consciousness, J. Baudrillard even introduces a term such as "Santa Claus's logic", by which he understands not the logic of thesis and evidence, but the logic of legend and involvement in it.

That is why the political life of the society is increasingly becoming the sphere of show business and public relations, that fact let the famous Canadian media researcher McLuhan (2013) call the modern world a "global village" and an era of "a new tribal man", as the media "bring a man back into a primitive state in which the auditory-visual multidimensional perception of collectivity and the whole world comes first". The myth reigns in the "global village", and, according to M. McLuhan's prophecy, the emotional climate of whole cultures can be controlled with the help of the mass media.

With the development of the information society, the role of the mediator, which was previously assigned to the media, has become obsolete, as modern life has largely become dependent on media services. These transformations affect not only the political sphere. All aspects of social development in the modern world can be traced in the connection with the media: entertainment and household, economic, social, cultural spheres, etc. Developing and improving at a fast pace the media quietly fit into the spatial and existential environment of society, dictating their way, offering services and conditions, when even money turns into a purely virtual commodity. These are challenges that mankind has not met before. And the main paradox that came at the same time as the silencing of information - the abundance of information and even the possession of the abundance of information - does not mean the possession of knowledge. Knowledge does not take hold, but installations imposed by different information flows take hold.

Despite numerous attempts to investigate the phenomenon, the understanding of information overload is redefined, so far scientific sources have described certain characteristics and properties of the phenomenon, and there is no single, clear definition of it, there is no strict systematization. This situation is explained, in our opinion, by objective reasons, because, firstly, the methods of information impact are changing, secondly, this study needs the efforts of scientists at the interdisciplinary level. It is also necessary to take into account the universal drug dependence of the user on information, and each of us is familiar with the situation when in searching for the necessary information on the Internet we get interested in some other information, forgetting as a result what we were initially looking for. Secondary information often captures our attention, takes away precious time, and even while on vacation, a person's hand stretches to a smartphone. As a result, it is difficult to concentrate attention on the only task, as the ease of access to a variety of information invisibly draws us into a flow of information, sometimes completely unnecessary. DeStefano and LeFevre (2007) state that the user constantly has the temptation associated with the hypertext nature of the Internet, increasing cognitive load when working with hypertext may also be due to the fact that the reading process is interrupted, attention is distracted by images, graphics, comments and clues - this kind of data is usually recognized as advantages because it gives hypertext interactivity.

Specialists in online journalism began to operate with the term “clickbait”, which is made of “click” and “bait”. It is about such an image or a skillfully written sentence on the Internet, which will certainly attract our attention and we will “bite on the bait”, and click the link, which, of course, will bring income to the person who was able to successfully invent the “original” headline. We see similar tricks in the media when a variety of some unexpected tricks are used to ensure that a person stays on a given channel and does not switch to another. The user is not deprived of empathy and cannot resist the audiovisual onslaught of demonstrated experiences. As Trufanova (2019) rightly suggests, it is necessary for users to form a “special reading skill”.

We would add, and a special skill of being online, a special skill of watching TV, etc. But so far special skills are acquired by those who sell us goods through mass media: in the top 3 most demanded skills of PR-specialists - knowledge of marketing technologies and search of information and analytics in the sphere of goods promotion.

So, in the information society, media opportunities have proved to be a convenient tool not only for manipulating public consciousness, forming and designing reality but also for profit, when even those resources, that claim to perform news functions, are forced to use “clickbaits” and other techniques of attracting attention, appealing to primitive human instincts or containing false but attractive information. But it is not only these trends that form the basis of information overload. For example, modern television channels stream scenes of violence, stories about cruelty, offer a great choice of thrillers. Most shows contain scenarios of injustice, a lot of information about murders, disasters. According to psychologists, scenes of cruelty and violence are part of a complex of negativity that people like because the life shown on TV is worse than their life. Demand generates supply, and indeed, the demand is what the society agrees to pay for.

Therefore, broadcasts containing scenes of cruelty have high ratings, which encourages writers, directors and other authors of scenes of violence in pursuit of profit to create similar programs. According to Kahn and Liefoghe (2012), some reports, advertisers insist on a frequent display of death scenes. Advertising experts, adhering to Freud’s ideas, believe that death scenes most excite the attention and interest of TV viewers and readers, as it satisfies the subconscious complex of Thanatos (a term used to refer to death attraction). Undoubtedly, that is a controversial thesis, in terms of regular life perception.

Moreover, such an approach carries risks to the psyche not only of an adult personality but also of a growing generation. Scientists understand information and psychological risk factors that influence the person as such characteristics of the human-information environment system, which are potentially dangerous to normal life.

Nevertheless, we have a massive dependence on information, and the creators of information are well aware that information impact is always psychological and determines human behavior indirectly, through neural connections of the brain. As a result, the flows of information that surround a person threaten to overload the human memory, as message codes do not always correspond to patterns of perception and there is no adequate relationship between the flows of information and the mental and psychological properties of the person’s attention and memory. An additional burden on the human psyche is the component of information flows, which purposefully affects the psychophysiological state of the population in the periods before elections (political PR and manipulation of consciousness). The information onslaught

is carried out by means of manipulation of political beliefs, views and preferences of the individual. In turn, the process of using media by political actors turned politics itself into a media process, causing the emergence of a virtual political space. Therefore, it is possible to state:

- We observe decreasing civic responsibility of journalism and, in general, mass media towards society,
- Increasing dependence and control of mass media dictate information policy.

Information overload is a situation caused by the use of the capabilities of mass media actors to acquire certain benefits. It is a process in which the media and interests of the subjects of the acquisition of goods through the production of some information are joined in the area of interests, procedures and practices for the creation of socio-political relevant meanings, for the manipulation of the consciousness of the individual and society as a whole. And discourse, deliberately introduced into the situation by the subject of mass media, can look neutral, objective, nevertheless, bring changes, for example, to the principles of recruitment and work of political leaders, marketing of goods, perception of socially significant events and phenomena, etc.

Let us emphasize that in modern conditions information onslaught is inherent in any political regime. Information overload includes influence of advertising on consumers, marketing mechanisms and in general economic flows, everyday culture, electoral involvement of citizens, perception of news information, attitude towards political leaders, and in general trust in the media. At the same time, information flows can take various forms - from the introduction of purchases to the concentration of minds, when political meanings are broadcast unchanged or created in positive cooperation, to open confrontation, reinforced by propaganda. Usually, major structural changes are accompanied by landmark forms firmly established in the public consciousness (for example, the “age of transparency”, the “cold war”, the “thaw”, the “Arab Spring”, etc.).

The process of information overloading is a kind of communicative process caused by virtualization of information space, a process of uncontrolled issuance of affected information by stakeholders from mass media. This is an opportunity to use the potential of new media for the benefit of individual groups, as in today’s information society media opportunities have proved to be a convenient tool for influencing, at a minimum, human attention, formation and design of the right reality.

Therefore, the researcher of the information space Chamorro-Premuzic (2014) is quite right when he calls most of the information that is imposed on us “fast food”. Indeed, according to data of 2014 IBM research, 90% of all online information data held was created in the previous two years. The situation still remains similar, as modern mass media impose information on us based on tastes and preferences of users who have time for unlimited viewing of TV and content on Internet networks. These are usually young people and/or individuals without time constraints. In addition, a very large segment of information on the Internet is messages that contain the exchange of mutual insults between users.

But what is common to all of us - the feeling of “lag” from the rhythm of life, if we did not have time to respond to the letter in time, to react in time to meaningful information, dependence on the Internet, which allows to save time on purchases of air tickets, goods, to lay the route, etc. It is a state of “online

war”, where a person is afraid not to react, not to answer, to remain without Internet communication. It’s a vicious circle that you can’t get out of.

The key aspects of the problem, therefore, remain beyond the scope of the study:

- 1) how to train the individual to correctly search for information;
- 2) how to convince the “generation of gadgets” to keep knowledge, as knowledge “on the hard disk” of their brain is much more important than on the disk of the computer;
- 3) how to help “dependent” on computer games and on social media;
- 4) how to protect young people from being recruited in social networks into sects, extremist and terrorist organizations;
- 5) how to protect children from websites of criminals of different kinds: paedophiles, maniacs, suicide teachers, etc.;
- 6) how to protect society from those who, for profit, create in the mass media an image of a world filled with risks that supply an unlimited flow of negative information;
- 7) how to protect society from those who, for the sake of profit, expose in mass media the certain feelings, thus defamatory and devaluating the moral feelings of society as a whole;
- 8) how to protect society from those who, for the sake of profit in mass media replicate a mistake or carelessly abandoned word, misconduct or miss of a person;
- 9) how to protect society from total surveillance, from the disclosure of intimate details;
- 10) how to keep borders between private and personal, etc.

All this increases the level of anxiety in modern society. The mass audience is overloaded with information flows and is in a state of “information stress”.

7. Conclusion

We assume that there are several key signs that indicate “informational overload” or “informational stress”:

- First, it is the aggressive imposition of unnecessary for users information;
- Secondly, the overexploitation of obnoxious advertising in the environment, sometimes not respecting the feelings of those to whom it is directed;
- Political PR, which became a symbiosis of political propaganda, etc.
- The environment that helps create the overload:
- Possibility of profit in the information space;
- Communication technologies that enable everyone to get into another person’s space;

The resulting dependence of the same individual on communication technologies, etc.

Information overload is a complex phenomenon uniting purposely used and specially designed information which task is to circulate between components of a public system and to sell doubtful goods, manipulating social and political consciousness.

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