

Two types of theories about manipulative communication

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to explore and classify the theories of manipulation. Our thesis is that manipulation constitutes a form of manipulative utilisation of communication; in fact, manipulation is communication, is manipulative communication. Taking into account that under the action of manipulation the judgement of the manipulated is paralysed, in individualising the manipulative persuasive intervention, we emphasise that the effect of mental paralysis is achieved by the manipulator coordinating their efforts directly by means of the manipulating message with indirect influences induced by the situation of manipulation. In this regard one may delimit two types of theories: the theory of message manipulation and theory of situational manipulation. The reality is that manipulation is message-situational and situational-message to the same extent.

Keywords: communication; manipulative communication; message manipulation theory; situational manipulation theory

1. INTRODUCTION

In relation to the criterion of constraint, manipulation can be characterised as a form of persuasion without constraint. Both interpersonal manipulation and group or social manipulation are done without constraint, without violence, without pressure. Etymologically, “to manipulate” originates from the French word “manipuler” which means “to handle, to manoeuvre”, manipulation meaning “the action to manipulate and its result” (DEX, 1996, p. 597).

“Manipul” was the tactical basic unit of the Roman army. The manipul had a unitary benefit. The current meaning of the word “manipular” includes the idea of automatic integration into the unit of the group seen as manipul. Manipulation is experienced within the group as a kind of contagion: the individual does what the group does, they are manipulated not by the group, but by the deed of the group. On the other hand, the deed of the group is imposed by the order of a commander. In this manipulating situation, the commander of manipul is the one manipulating, they are the manipulator.

2. MESSAGE AND SITUATION IN MANIPULATION

There are two types of theories of manipulation: message and situational theories.

A. The message theory is of communicologic nuance and it affirms that that which triggers manipulation is the message. "The element message, show Newsom and Carrell (Newsom D., Carrell B., 2004, p. 74), is often the most important in this process".

Among those who give primary importance to message are Leventhal, Singer, Jones, Wallace Fotheringham, W. J. McGuire, Gleicher and Petty.

Leventhal, Singer and Jones made an experiment, by administering an anxiogenic message to a group and providing therein a possibility to control the situation. The anxiogenic message was transmitted to another group without making available to it any instruction about how to keep the situation under control. The conclusion of the team was that the message prevails in relation to the situation, because the persuasive effect of the anxiogenic message proved to be stronger to the extent where this message circulated as instruction to control the situation. When the possibilities to avoid the danger are not found in the message which informs them about that danger, the individual prefers not to think about the danger, letting themselves be impacted by that danger. When the message contains solutions, the individual strengthens to find saving solutions.

Wallace Fotheringham (1966) is one of the first message experts, who defined persuasion as that complex of effects on receivers, that is caused by the message of the persuasive agent.

William J. McGuire (McGuire W.-H., 1973, p. 21) shows that the message lies at the centre of the persuasion process, performed sequentially in seven steps. The first step is presenting the message, imposing the presence. This is followed by the participation of the target, by paying attention: the receiver's attention must be stimulated to the persuasive message. The alert ones shall understand the message: comprehension. The message must be developed as such as the target would accept and agree with the position stated. The fifth step is retaining the information content transmitted. The sixth and last step is the action.

Gleicher and Petty have studied the ability of an anxiogenic message to give effect under the conditions where it provides securing ways. They exposed the students to an anxiogenic message about criminality in the camps. The message delivered securing expectations. When the students believed in the validity of the solution conveyed by the message, they favourably evaluated arguments motivated the solution, whether they were weak or strong. When the expectations relative to the efficiency of resolution appeared to be insufficiently provided, the students paid attention to a greater extent on arguments.

Leventhal also gives a primary importance to message. According to this distinguished professor, the production of the journalistic text (without losing sight of the importance of each of the decisive factors for the profile of the situation of journalistic communication) is organised according to the message. The elements of the situation of communication are planned and organised in relation to the transfer of the message. The journalistic effort is efficient if the message has effect. Therefore, under the conditions where the receiver has the possibility "to permanently operate a selection of messages" (Roşca L., 2004, p. 95), they must be attracted by the propagated message. Taking into account that the "receiver chooses the media text/message knowingly, according to the contractual terms and their scope of expectation" (Roşca L., 2004, p. 94) it is concluded that the "accessibility of messages" (Roşca L., 2004, p. 92) and optimally setting the time and place for "diffusing the messages" (Roşca L., 2004, p. 77) are necessary. Therefore, the message prevails in journalistic communication, and above all, not the situation of journalistic communication.

Informational expectations triggered by the intellect are then differentiated, which have a cogitative convergence in the need for knowing, self-knowing, understanding, discovering: the need to range (expected information about personalities, models, notabilities in relation to which the consumer of information is intellectually located), the need for novelty (expected information about new discoveries), the need to understand what is happening (acts and deeds, intellectual events) and the need to use the knowledge.

According to Daniela Zeca-Buzura (Zeca-Buzura D., 2005, p. 83), "beyond the information communicated" (...), "the viewer is left at the end with a subjective impression", which is why the communicator's attention must start from an "intention of communication" and from a "message" which they would try to create by using the means they have available.

B. The situational theories are rooted in the social psychology and they conclude that the situation is that which has a primary role in manipulation.

The most important representative of the situational theory is Alex Mucchielli. He substantiated his theory in "Les situations de la communication". His theory is reinforced by two studies, which were also translated into Romanian, "Arta de a influența" (The Art of Influence) and "Arta de a comunica" (The Art of Communication). Alex Mucchielli says that "to communicate means to intervene with the purpose to change the other's situation" (Mucchielli A., 2005, p. 84). According to the Swiss specialist, "any word is an attempt to influence the other" (Mucchielli A., 2002, p. 11). "The Art of Influence" is an "analysis of the manipulation techniques" the postulate of which is that every word, by manipulating the contextual elements of the situation of communication which is necessarily part of restructures the situation in order to let arise some significations serving the interest of the speaker who speaks them (Mucchielli A., 2002, p. 13). Communication is not a transmission of information, but a construction of significations. The influence is the fundamental phenomenon of communication: "communication means influence" (Mucchielli A., 2002, p. 191). With communication, it is aimed to transmit a meaning which can only be configured in the situation. "To manipulate (or influence), states A. Mucchielli, means to intervene (by action or by word, meaning by communication) on the components of the situation of communication. By modifying these elements, the structure of the situation is modified and therefore, also the meaning of the events in progress" (Mucchielli A., 2002, p. 191).

One of the Romanian representatives of the situational theory is Bogdan Ficeac. He starts from the idea that "social situation exercises a significant control on the human behaviour", the individual's actions and reactions to stimuli in a given environment being "determined by forces and constraints specific to that environment" (Ficeac B., 2001, p. 30). Under these conditions, manipulation is defined situationally thus: "we may speak of manipulation when a certain social situation is premeditatedly created in order to influence the manipulators' reactions and behaviour, to the meaning desired by the manipulator" (Ficeac B., 2001, p. 30).

The definitional draft of the "Dictionary of Sociology" is also classified on the situational direction (Căpîr C., Vlăsceanu L., 1993, pp. 336 - 337): "by manipulation, it is not intended to understand the situation more correctly and profoundly, but to inoculate a convenient understanding, turning to mislead (which is a form of lie – n.n.) with false arguments, as well as to appealing to non-rational levels". Within the situation, understanding the situation, manipulation is formed as "an action to determine a social actor (person, collectiveness, group) to think and act compatibly with the initiator's interests, and not with their own interests, by using some persuasion techniques which intentionally distort the truth". We do not consider that the action of manipulation occurs in the situation as the target of the action which a person, group, collectiveness forms, that persuasion techniques are used and misleading prevails

therein. In addition, the authors of the dictionary differentiate manipulation from the “rationally convincing type of influence” We consider that this situational definition, beyond its value and utility, falls into error when it concludes that a form of persuasion uses “persuasion techniques”, and not “techniques of rationally convincing”. This is because we, in other words, are told that a form of persuasion does not use influences of conviction type. On the other hand, a message element is also drawn into the definition when showing: “the actual intentions of that who transmits the message remain insensitive to its patrimony”. Of course, taken as components-forms of persuasion, manipulation, propaganda, disinformation, intoxication and rumour have something in common: persuasion. If we want manipulation to occupy a range in persuasion, then we need do proceed at its segregation of propaganda and advertising. Manipulation is however outside the propaganda, outside advertising. Manipulation can occur anywhere and anytime (Stavre, 2011). We can interconnect them only when we want to detail characteristics of the over-ordered persuasion or when we seek to differentiate them as if by comparison.

According to many specialists the action of manipulation means to deceive the (military, economical or political) opponent regarding the real intentions and weakening their will through actions of disinformation. From our point of view, manipulation is an action in the operational-procedural technology of which operations such as the (deceit is a form of the lie), seduction, fiction and myth are classified. An operation is achieved through “actions”, that manipulation is done through actions of disinformation and that the objective of manipulation is to deceive the opponent.

C. The message direction is also just as secluded and unproductive. The truth is that manipulation is an influencing intervention of a persuasive type, which by using a manipulating message and valorising a situation of manipulation, determines the change of thinking and current action of a target (person, group, collectiveness). Concerning the source and target of manipulation, one may say that anyone can be a target or a source. Depending on the type of manipulation (interpersonal or social) the target is individualised specifically.

Cristian Florin Popescu considers that in recent years it has been proven that persuasion and influence (...) are intrinsic to media communication (Popescu C.F., 2002, p. 172), understanding that the media would be defined as influencing and persuasive. C.F. Popescu is not interested to debate manipulation, considering that the term manipulation would not be appropriate for certain “historical circumstances: world wars, the Cold War, totalitarian regimes, where the stakes are the indoctrination and all that belongs to psychological war” (Popescu C. F., 2002, p. 172).

3. CONCLUSIONS

Manipulation uses the pseudo-information (that apparent information which, according to Andreas Freund (Freund A., 1991, p 263) is outlined by obscurantism and/or hidden advertising) para-information (minor and diluted version of informing which, as shown by A. Freund (Freund A., 1991, 263), consists in replacing authentic information, minor, sensational and customised aspects hereof), under-information and over-information. That is, manipulation fully uses ex-information.

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