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Social Impact: Theories, Tools and Examples of Propaganda and Persuasive Statements used in Polish Elections of 2015

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ABSTRACT

Objectives. The purpose of presented study is to discuss the chosen theories, mechanisms and tools of social impact, which allow influencing individuals and groups, in reference to Polish election campaigns 2015. The effectiveness of media content influence on the recipient is considered with view to achieving the expected results, such as changes in behaviour, attitudes, etc. This issue is relevant in Poland and there is a need to analyse it.

Methodology. This study is both theoretical and empirical. Theoretical background includes considering the concept of social impact and the origins of shaping public opinion, inspired by the John Zaller's classic work "The Nature and Origins of Public Opinion" (1992). The empirical contribution involves the content analysis of the set of examples from Polish presidential and parliamentary election campaigns of 2015.

Results and Conclusions. The techniques described and classified by the American Institute for Propaganda Analysis in the far 1937, were broadly used in Polish media within the 2015 presidential and parliamentary election campaigns. Referring to the classic examples of media impact, the author considers the relevance of the propaganda tools. Based on the analyses of the concrete election cases, a conclusion is substantiated that such old propaganda techniques as word games, false connections, special appeals, name calling and glittering generalities are still effectively used in the contemporary communication, despite the improving of people's media literacy and competence.

KEYWORDS: social impact; propaganda techniques; persuasive statements.

Соціальний вплив: теорії, інструменти й приклади використання пропаганди і спонукальних заяв під час виборів у Польщі 2015 року

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Резюме

Метою представленого дослідження є аналіз теорій, механізмів та інструментів соціального впливу на прикладі польських виборних кампаній 2015 р. Розглядається актуальність питання ефективності впливу медіа-контенту на споживача інформації в контексті досягнення очікуваних результатів такого впливу (зміни поведінки, зміни ставлення тощо). Дослідження включає як теоретичну, так і емпіричну компоненти. Теоретичні основи спираються на концепції соціального впливу і формування громадської думки, включаючи класичну працю Дж. Заллера «Природа і походження громадської думки» (1992). Емпірична частина включає контент-аналіз прикладів комунікаційних технік, що використовувалися у Польщі під час президентських і парламентських виборів 2015 р. У ході дослідження з'ясовано, що методи, описані і класифіковані американським Інститутом аналізу пропаганди ще в далекому 1937 р., широко й ефективно використовувалися в ході останніх польських виборних кампаній, попри загальне зростання рівня медіаграмотності та медіакомпетентності населення.

Ключові слова: соціальні наслідки, методи пропаганди, спонукальні заяви.

Сыновец А. Социальное влияние: теории, инструменты и примеры использования пропаганды и побудительных заявлений во время выборов в Польше 2015 г.

Целью представленного исследования является анализ теорий, механизмов и инструментов социального влияния на примере польских избирательных кампаний 2015 г. Рассматривается актуальность вопроса эффективности воздействия медиа-контента на потребителя информации в контексте достижения ожидаемых результатов такого воздействия (изменения поведения, изменения отношения и т.д.). Исследование включает как теоретическую, так и эмпирическую компоненты. Теоретические основы опираются на концепции социального влияния и формирования общественного мнения, включая классический труд Дж. Заллера «Природа и происхождение общественного мнения» (1992). Эмпирическая часть включает контент-анализ примеров коммуникационных техник, используемых в Польше во время президентских и парламентских выборов 2015 г. В ходе исследования выявлено, что методы, описанные и классифицированные американским Институтом анализа пропаганды еще в далеком 1937 г., широко и эффективно использовались в ходе последних польских избирательных кампаний, несмотря на общий рост уровня медиаграмотности и медиакомпетентности населения.

Ключевые слова: социальные последствия, методы пропаганды, побудительные заявления.

1. Introduction

The XXth century was called “the century of propaganda” [1, 9]. In that century, the propaganda developed into a large-scale mechanism of influencing individuals and societies. The aim of propagandist is to change people's behaviour while making them believe that this change results from their free will. The multiple communication techniques are used in order to control the people's will [2, 87]. The process that changes behaviour, attitude, emotion or motivation is called “social impact”. There are various techniques of the social impact including the persuasion, propaganda, advertising, media manipulation, education (symbolic violence), media influence and etc. According to E.Aronson and A.Pratkanis, the social impact results from the real or imagined behaviour and/or opinion expressed by another person or group [1, 10].

Propaganda was not invented by the Americans or the Germans during the World War II, as many people believe – the power of words had been noticed by the ancient Greeks and the Romans already. The Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle came to conclusions that language has a persuasive function. In 1622, the word “propaganda” was used for the first time in the Vatican commission document devoted to the spreading of the Roman Catholic faith: *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* [2, 87]. The above-mentioned commission was designed within the struggle against the protestant movement inspired by Martin Luter. Thus, the term “propaganda” gained negative connotation among the Protestant communities.

The concept of propaganda came into common use only in early XXth century, when it began to be identified as the persuasive tactics used during the World War I, and later by the totalitarian regimes [1, 17]. Development of mass communication enabled access to the audiences of millions; the press and particularly radio and cinema played a great role in the possibility of “management over souls”. The most comprehensive studies on mass communication were dedicated to the propaganda content. While analysing the propaganda content, Harold Lasswell drew a theory of magic bullet (media content reach a recipient at once and triggers an immediate response), Walter Lippmann developed a theory of public opinion (his concept of stereotypes is still actual) [2, 91-98].

Disinformation, black propaganda (spreading lies), grey propaganda (information that can be both false and true) and other tools used to influence human minds did not vanish with the end of the Cold War. The creation and reproduction of ideological superstructures takes place in democratic societies as well; techniques classified and described by the Institute of Propaganda Analysis are broadly used in mass communication nowadays. They refer to the certain historical situation and context, reflect reality and reveal the structure of actual processes taking place in societies.

2. Basic theoretical concepts and research methods

The aim of this study is to examine the theories, tools and examples of social impact, to show how the media influence human minds in contemporary societies. In this paper, the main concepts of media social impact are showed at the examples of Polish elections. The author searched for the answer to the question, whether the social impact of media can be measured? Is it possible to rule the democratic, developed and reasonable societies by the means of social impact mechanism, particularly propaganda? Examining case studies, its is noticed, that such techniques as word games, false connections, special appeals, name calling, glittering generalities, euphemisms and etc. [3] still work among individuals and groups with improved communication competences and skills. Is it a paradox or maybe an evidence of extremely well worked-out schemes? How do ideologies work nowadays? [4, 88-89]. And what everyday news content has to do with producing and introducing ideologies into society? Does television affect people's political choices and

attitudes? These questions have been analysed in this study.

This research is inspired by John Zaller's study on *The Nature and Origins of Public Opinion* (1992), in which the author brilliantly shows how people form political preferences, how news and political argument diffuse through large populations, how individuals evaluate this information in light of their political values, and how they convert their reactions into vote decisions in elections [5, 1]. J.Zaller examined the relation between media coverage and public opinion's attitude to the U.S. army involvement in the conflict in Persian Gulf in 1992. The way the media presented the conflict in the Middle East strongly influenced the public opinion shaping around this issue. J.Zaller presented his outcomes in 1992, but the question about the role of television in shaping "collective knowledge" has not lost its relevance. Having in mind the classic works in the relevant field, I focus on Polish examples of shaping the public opinion by means of techniques that had been classified and described by the Institute of Propaganda Analysis. The aim of this study is to unmask and reveal the tools of media influence used in the presidential and parliamentary campaigns in Poland, rich in propaganda schemes and discursive strategies, dividing electorate into two hostile tribes. It is shown in the study that ideology is providing the incentives to motivate social classes to further steps. "They do not know it, but they do it" [6, 79]. Media content performs an important function in creation and reproduction of the ideological superstructures.

This paper is both theoretical and empirical. Theoretical background consists of the concept of social impact and origins of public opinion shaping. The empirical contribution involves content analysis of selected texts from the presidential and parliamentary elections in Poland in 2015.

3. Results and Discussion

Propaganda and persuasive statements used in Polish election campaigns in 2015

Information, access to information and use of information are the valuable resources. Preparing, delivering and broadcasting of the information is not only the matter of social communication field, but also a part of broad process of social engineering, aimed at winning the audience for a particular point of view, attitude, way of behaviour. Information war is a feature characterizing the *Third Wave societies* [7]. According to A.Toffler, the post-industrial societies have noticed and appreciated information as a powerful resource worth struggling for. One of the fields, in which the information war can be observed as an object of analysis, is politics. Therefore, the election campaign can be defined as a kind of lens, in which many different techniques and tools of social impact combines. In this study, I would like to pay attention to the set of mechanisms and instruments distinguished by the American Institute of Propaganda Analysis (IPA), and to demonstrate how these mechanisms and instruments are successfully used today.

The IPA exemplified seven common propaganda devices [3]:

- **Name calling:** using insulting or abusive language either to a person or a group (recalling *ad personam*: one of rhetoric arguments collected by Arthur Schopenhauer. *Ad personam* is frequently used, when opponents lack of rational arguments). This strategy is especially popular in political discourse.

- **Glittering generalities:** "glittering generality has two qualities – it is vague and it has positive connotations. Words and phrases such as *common good, reform, courage, democracy, freedom, hope, patriotism, strength*, are terms with which people all over the world have powerful associations and they may have trouble disagreeing with them. However, these words are highly abstract and ambiguous, and meaningful differences exist regarding what they actually mean or should mean in the real world" [3].

- **Transfer:** "this is a technique of projecting positive or negative qualities (praise or blame) of a person, entity, object, or value (an individual, group, organiza-

tion, nation, patriotism, etc.) to another in order to make the second more acceptable or to discredit it. It evokes an emotional response, which stimulates the target to identify with recognized authorities. Often highly visual, this technique often utilizes symbols superimposed over other visual images” [3].

- **Testimonial:** consists of a person's written or spoken statement extolling the virtue of a product [3]. It is frequently used in advertising and politics.

- **Plain folks** – pretending to be an average Smith: “a plain folks argument is one in which the speaker presents him or herself as common person, who can understand and empathize with a listener's concerns. The most important part of this appeal is the speaker's portrayal of themselves as someone who has had a similar experience to the listener, and knows why they may be sceptical or cautious about accepting the speaker's point of view” [3].

- **Card stacking** “is a propaganda technique that seeks to manipulate audience perception of an issue by emphasizing one side and repressing another. Such emphasis may be achieved through media-bias or the use of one sided testimonials, or by simply censoring the voices of critics. The technique is commonly used in persuasive speeches by political candidates to discredit their opponents and to make themselves seem more worthy” [3].

- **Bandwagon:** it is a “phenomenon whereby the rate of uptake of beliefs, ideas, fads and trends increases the more that they have already been adopted by others. In other words, the bandwagon effect is characterized by the probability of individual adoption increasing with respect to the proportion who have already done so. As more people come to believe in something, others *also hop on the bandwagon* regardless of the underlying evidence” [3].

The above listed techniques were used during two political campaigns that took place in 2015, in Poland in order to maximize the election result. Common propaganda devices appeared in political ads, political meetings, speeches and debates. To be impartial, I would provide the examples of each propaganda technique coming from two main rivals and its supporters – the PIS Party (right-wing Law and Justice Party, ruled by Jaroslav Kaczynski) and the PO Party (liberal-conservative Civic Platform, ruled by Donald Tusk and after his nomination for President of European Council – by his nominee Ewa Kopacz). This repertoire is of course limited and does not include the whole spectrum of propaganda techniques used by other candidates and political parties during elections. But it is enough to show the propaganda techniques used in Poland to gain the social impact.

3.1. Name calling

Using insulting or abusive language is one of the strategies frequently used in contemporary political discourse in Poland. During the last two election campaigns, this kind of persuasive communication was a part of discourse especially in social media. Name calling it is a type of message that neglects rational argumentation; it refers only to emotions, mainly negative ones. The strength of name calling can be seen at many available examples of *hate speech*, used by the interlocutors to one another or towards a certain group of people (for example, ethnic and religious minorities). Supporters and opponents of candidates and political parties argued by means of vulgar, insulting and aggressive comments. It was also revealed, that election teams hired and paid for offensive comments spread in the Internet [8]. From this point of view, two last Polish election campaigns were exceptional. This time, communication through social media – vertical interactions (from candidates and political parties to public opinion) as well as horizontal interactions (between social media users) – was equally important to the traditional election spots and political conventions.

Some name callings used in the process of communication during the election campaign were of formative type. For example, the opponents of Bronislaw Komorowski frequently called him “Komoruski”, which is a kind of wordplay joining name of the candidate and adjective “ruski” in Polish language standing for “Russian”. In the discourse of opponents Komorowski was perceived as a person involved in Russian interests. Supporters of Civic Platform were la-

belled by the right-wing followers as “sickies” – this term in Polish language is also of a formative kind, as “POpapańcy” means sick people in Polish slang. Thus, indication of the Civic Platform followers by prefix “PO” had a clear message: as if the Civic Platform supporters were mentally ill people. In turn, the Civic Platform followers named the Law and Justice party supporters by offensive term “PISiory”, which associate abbreviation of party’s name (PIS) with English informal verb “to pee” or “to piss” that is a synonym of “to urinate”. For description of political ideology introduced by the Law and Justice, the followers of the Civic Platform invented a term “kaczyzm” – in meaning which was very close to “duck doctrine” or “ducktator”, joining surname of its leader with a noun “dictatorship”.

Usual, the politicians themselves try to avoid such offensive and insulting language as was mentioned above. But one of the name callings was widely used during the 2015 election campaigns – the term “leftist” indicating left-wing and liberal-conservative followers was introduced in order to show the lack of patriotism or a sense of a national belonging. In turn, the Civic Platform and left-wing supporters used a rhetorical comparison dividing people into “Europeans” (modern, young and educated people willing for Poland’s development in EU structures) and “traditionalist” (older, reserved, and attached to confession and more traditional lifestyles). Thus, the political discourse split voters into two contrasted groups, integrated around two artificially invented visions of Poland.

3.2. Glittering generalities

Emotionally appeals to the commonly shared beliefs and values were widely used during the presidential and parliamentary campaigns in Poland in 2015. Glittering generalities evoke positive emotions related to such thing as patriotism, willingness to consent or desire for national glory, and thus they are appropriate instruments for the slogans. The slogan endorsing political campaign for re-election of Bronislaw Komorowski was the following: “Choose consent and safety”, why the main opposition candidate Andrzej Duda’s motto was: “The future’s name is Poland”. B.Komorowski’s slogan was based on the assumption that right-wing candidates were unpredictable and could harm Polish image and position that had been painstakingly built the previous years. The main message hidden in this slogan was the “protection of *status quo*”. In turn, the motto chosen by A.Duda’s staff was referring to the future, to the establishing of a new vision of Poland’s development. A.Duda’s slogan also recalled the concept of Motherland Poland. Both slogans and billboard compositions of two main candidates were static and maintained in conventional style. “We are still waiting for a slogan like Obama’s *Yes, we can!*” – As one of the Newsweek Polish Edition’s journalist commented.

The messages of slogans in the parliamentary elections were quite different from the presidential one, and they were updated with the duration of election campaign. The right-wing Law and Justice Party followed Obama’s e introduced election campaign with a slogan “We can do it”. The Civic Platform learnt a bitter lesson from the defeat in presidential elections and set for the future under the banner “Yes. It is about Your future”. The Law and Justice Party finished campaign with a motto “Work, not promises”, while the liberal-conservative Civic Platform closed campaign with the leading idea “A strong economy, higher salaries”. The concepts used by both main rivals have got positive connotations among the voters. However, the high level of abstraction made them meaningless as they could not refer to the objective conditions [3].

3.3. Transfer

This technique involves transfer of the authority and prestige form one object to another – for which we want to win the people’s favour [9, 14-15]. Usually, the symbols which are important for the particular community are used to associate objects, ideas or people with the positive connotations. National symbols such as flag, emblem and anthem as well as religious symbols such as cross – are widely used as instruments to win the people’s support. These signs evoke positive emotions and work efficiently in persuasive and propaganda messages. The flapping flags during the political conventions, and the flags and national symbols used in the election commercials –

are typical examples of transfer technique. Such transfer is a kind of false connection – on the basis of false premises people make judgments about reality. Another transfer tactic is establishing honorary committees, engaging famous intellectuals, actors, sportsmen and other celebrities in favour of the candidate or political party. During the election campaigns of 2015 in Poland, both transfer tactics were used. Political commercials played on emotions referring to the symbols of Polish collective identity. On the other hand, the honorary committees consisting of well-known people were perceived as authorities. Transfer as a propaganda device is effective due to the positive attitudes transferring from the common symbols or respected people to another objects.

3.4. Testimonial

Testimonial is very similar to the transfer. What actually differ one technique from another can be defined as directness. Testimonial consists of the person's written or spoken statement extolling the virtue of a product [3]. If a famous person directly recommends a candidate or political party – it is called testimonial. Citations of significant and well-known people make political statements reliable. Since 2010 (the date of catastrophe of the president's aircraft in Smolensk), actors are mainly those who are involved in providing testimonials to the main political parties, the Civic Platform and the Law and Justice Party. When the well-known person supports the party, it attracts people and makes them think: *If such a person supports candidate "X", I also will do!* During the last election campaigns many Polish celebrities made public statements in support of presidential nominees and/or political parties. At the finish of presidential campaign, even several chief editors of newspapers and magazines (for example, "Newsweek Polish Edition") expressed in editorials the direct support to certain nominees. Strong emotions were seen both in the right-wing and in the left-wing press.

3.5. Plain folks

Plain folks can be described as a special appeal applying the idea of ordinariness to justify certain object as the proper and adequate one. In practice, the politicians and candidates usually want to present themselves as average citizens in order to look more reliable and trustworthy. Plain folks device encourage politicians to act in more casual way, to show their ordinary, to be seen in the context that differs from the official one. This strategy is often used by the U.S. Presidents – people can see them fishing (George Bush), eating in MacDonald's (Bill Clinton) or ordering a burger and a glass of beer (Barack Obama). Acting like plain folks helps politician to create warmer and more human image. It also delivers a message that politicians are aware of the people's needs and problems.

During Polish election campaigns in 2015, this strategy was also used in a few cases. Thus, Andrzej Duda was travelling around Poland in his "DudaBus". The idea was very simple, but effective – being closer to people's problems. A.Duda didn't focus on the electorate of Warsaw and other big cities, but obtained people's favour by visiting small towns and outermost regions. It was also significant that the bus of future President was a product of Polish factory which became insolvent in 2013. Actually, the "DudaBus" turned out to be a very good PR idea provided with the message: "It is time for Poland, Polish factories and Polish products".

In turn, during the parliamentary election campaign, the Civic Platform introduced a slogan and idea for the Prime Minister Ewa Kopacz – to travel around Poland by railway: "Kolej na Ewę". This slogan has an ambiguous meaning, as "kolej" in Polish language means either "turn, in turn" or "railway". Thus, "Kolej na Ewę" can be decoded as "It is Ewa's turn". Travelling by train provided the possibility of direct contact and interactions with the Polish citizens. At the same time, the candidate for the Prime Minister on behalf of the Law and Justice exactly repeated A.Duda's manoeuvre with the bus. According to analysts, the knowledge of problems of local communities, direct communication and showing interest for those leaving far from the capital – were the key elements of electoral victory. Dynamic campaign in American style and being close to the people's problems resulted in the voters' trust.

3.6. Card stacking

Card stacking means intentional selection of facts and fakes, logical and illogical arguments to create positive or negative impression about the object, situation, person or group of people. Card stacking is often used in political programmes and debates with participation of the politicians. The aim of card stacking is to appeal to the emotional sphere of the recipient and to evoke the appropriate response, for example objection towards a candidate or a political party. Often, the politicians speak in superlatives about themselves and totally discredit the opponents. During both campaigns in 2015, the Law and Justice used “Poland in ruins” metaphor to describe Poland’s eight years under the Civic Platform government. During campaign tour across Poland, the Law and Justice used demolished closed factory as scenery for briefing, in order to illustrate the thesis “Poland in ruins” [10]. The Civic Platform speculated on possible danger of power seizure by the Law and Justice. The liberal-conservative wing played the card of “unpredictability” towards opponents. Another card used by the Civic Platform was: “We have done everything possible, we will do more”.

Discourse between the Civil Platform and the Law and Justice was in black and white tone. Both parties were stacking cards to justify own position and to blame opponent for all the failures and wrong decisions. The Law and Justice strategy was based on blaming the Civic Platform for the obscurantism and abandonment of promises, while the Civic Platform tried to take credit for all the recognized successes.

3.7. Bandwagon

Bandwagon is a ploy of promoting the false thesis as if all the members of a given community accept certain political program, so each voter has to support it [3]. Bandwagon effect is usually aimed at certain social group (of certain age or profession) or crowd. The messages are addressed and delivered in a similar way to the snowball effect: the more people from a group support the idea, the faster it disseminates among the group. At least two ideas introduced during the parliamentary elections caused such an effect: 1) 500 zlotys of monthly assistance for second and subsequent child; 2) restore the retirement age as it was before the reform. Surveys indicated so strong support to these ideas that made an impression of general acceptance for a certain political program. These ideas were so attractive to the people that it was hard to disagree with them.

4. Conclusions

It should be noted in conclusion that there are more propaganda tools than seven ones mentioned and briefly characterized above. The choice of particular propaganda techniques depend on possibilities, technical capacities, and target groups to whom propagandists address the messages. The classification made by Institute of Propaganda Analysis was criticized for being too simple as propaganda messages are often more sophisticated and use more than one technique of influence on the recipient [11]. But still, the typology worked out by IPA is a good basis for analyzing persuasive statements in contemporary communication. Examples discussed in this our study proves that the techniques which had been described by IPA are still widely applied in contemporary political discourse.

Contemporary societies are not enough resistant to the propaganda technique, despite the fact of highly developed communication skills and “technology literacy” (in comparison to earlier stages of social development). The issue of finding key to people’s souls appealing either to emotional or to rational is still the most important in politics. The techniques classified and outlined by American Institute of Propaganda Analysis were widely used during the latest Polish election campaigns, and conclusion on their effectiveness and applicability can be made. No matter how well educated the contemporary societies are.

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