

МЕДИАКОММУНИКАЦИИ



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Illustrations and Their Manipulative Significance in the Media

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Abstract

The article studies the role of illustrations as a powerful tool of manipulative communication in modern media. It analyses how visual elements such as photographs, graphs, and images can influence information perception and public opinion. The article aims to describe the mechanisms of manipulation, including the choice of illustrations, the context in which they are used, and the emotional impact they have. Particular attention is paid to how illustrations can reinforce stereotypes and evoke emotions, contributing to changes in audience behaviour. By studying real cases from the news reports and advertising campaign papers, the article demonstrates the ability of visual content to distort reality and undermine the objectivity of information.

Keywords: illustrations, manipulation, visual rhetorics, photography, advertising, psychology of perception

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Иллюстрации и их значение в манипулятивной коммуникации в сфере СМИ

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Аннотация

Рассматривается роль иллюстраций как мощного инструмента манипулятивной коммуникации в современных СМИ. Анализируется, как визуальные элементы, такие как фотографии, графики и изображения, могут влиять на восприятие информации и формирование общественного мнения. Цель статьи — описать механизмы манипуляции, включая выбор иллюстраций, контекст их использования и эмоциональную нагрузку, которую они несут. Особое внимание уделяется тому, как иллюстрации могут укреплять стереотипы и вызывать эмоции, способствуя изменению поведения аудитории. На основе анализа конкретных примеров из новостных репортажей и рекламных кампаний демонстрируется, как визуальный контент может исказить реальность и подрывать объективность информации.

Ключевые слова: иллюстрации, манипуляция, визуальная риторика, фотография, реклама, психология восприятия

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Introduction. Illustrations as an integral element of the media appeared several centuries ago.

Journalism and illustrations together form public opinion, document events, thereby enriching the visual and emotional spectrum of the reader. Illustrations played an important role in presenting events, especially in the period when there were no photographs, or they were poorly available.

With the advent of the first printed media in the 15th–16th centuries, the era of illustrated journalism began. It all started with metal engravings for visualizing news. In the 19th century, with the development of lithography, it became possible to create more detailed and realistic images of the travels to exotic countries, fashion shows, everyday life scenes with its social problems [1], which led to flourishing of illustrated magazines.

The 19th century became the “golden age” of illustration in journalism. Artists-correspondents sketched events from the first person. And such works became a powerful tool for influencing public opinion, showing the everyday life of people, heroic and terrible moments. Illustrations during this period acquired a reportage style, striving for maximum accuracy and objectivity [2].

The invention of photography in the mid-19th century created new competition for illustration. In the early stages, photography was difficult to use – it required much time, labour and technical costs. Therefore, illustration remained in demand, and illustrations offered opportunities for interpretation and stylization, which photography could not offer.

In the 20th century, with the development and wide availability of photography, illustration in journalism acquired new tasks and functions. It no longer just documented events but offered interpretation, expressed opinion, and served as a tool for social criticism. Artists created caricatures and satirical illustrations that sharply commented on political and social issues. Illustration became more conceptual and expressive, using metaphors, symbols, and stylization to convey complex ideas. A prominent example of caricature and satirical illustration is Charlie Hebdo, a French literary and artistic magazine of political satire. It publishes cartoons, reports, discussions, and nonconformist anecdotes.

With the development of digital technology, illustration in journalism is experiencing a new Renaissance. Digital tools allow artists to create complex and detailed images, combine different techniques and styles, and quickly adapt to changing editorial requirements. Illustration is increasingly used in online journalism, offering visual content to attract readers' attention and enrich digital storytelling. They use illustration to cover social issues, political events, and personal stories, creating works that make people think and have a powerful emotional impact [3].

Materials and Methods. Illustration, like any form of communication, has its own rhetoric. It uses visual elements—composition, colour, shape, symbols—to create a particular impression and persuade. Visual elements can be used to influence emotional perception through:

1) Exaggeration and emphasis: the illustrator can place accents in the image so as to highlight events or people, exaggerate their significance, illuminate negative features. Create a comic appearance of a politician, ridicule his appearance, behaviour, statements.

2) Concealment and distortion: this effect can be obtained by changing the angle of the picture or shooting, changing the proportions of the image, removing elements from the frame, changing colours.

3) Creating an emotional reaction: emotional reactions are needed to manipulate behaviour, convince the right point of view, induce action — write a comment, repost. Evoke strong emotions — sympathy, fear, anger, enthusiasm. Illustrations enhance the effect of text.

Research on the impact of illustrations on information perception in the field of communication has been conducted by many scientists and journalists in areas such as advertising and marketing, journalism, psychology, visual culture, art history and design, and politics. Stephen Palmer and Anne Treisman have been developing perception theories that explain how our brain processes visual information and how this can lead to distortions and errors [4].

Stephen Palmer is known for his research in the field of perception and visual information processing. He focused on understanding how attention is directed to visual stimuli and how life experience and expectations influence their perception. In one well-known experiment, Palmer investigated how previous experience affects object perception. Participants were shown images of tools and food, then photographs with unclear or partial images of these objects. The study showed that participants were more likely to correctly identify partially hidden objects if these objects were associated with the context in which they were previously presented. For example, if an image of ingredients for a dish was first shown, and then a blurry image of that dish, participants were more likely to correctly identify the image.

Anne Treisman proposed a model according to which visual information is processed at two levels: first, basic characteristics (colour, shape, etc.) are automatically highlighted, and then this information is integrated to form a holistic perception. Treisman's experiment was to show how attention is focused on certain object characteristics. During the experiment, participants were shown images with various objects, some of which had unusual characteristics (for example, a red apple among green ones). Participants more efficiently identified and processed unusual objects that stood out from others — this confirmed that attention can “highlight” important characteristics before they are fully understood. Treisman's work emphasizes that the perception of objects and scenes occurs in two stages: initial distinguishing of individual characteristics, followed by integration of these characteristics into a single whole. This is fundamentally important for understanding how we perceive complex visual signals.

The research by Palmer and Treisman together shows that perception is a complex and active process that depends on context, previous experience, and attention mechanisms. These psychological principles are important for understanding how visual communications can manipulate audience perception and be used in various media, advertising, and propaganda communication contexts.

Results. Several examples of illustration manipulation in the media, covering different historical periods and contexts could be identified:

1. Advertising illustrations: creating unrealistic beauty standards, for example, cosmetic and clothing advertisements that use images of models with retouched skin, perfect proportions, and unnatural bright makeup. These illustrations create unattainable beauty standards, making people feel insecure about their appearance and buy different products, which are capable of “correcting” imperfections. The goal is to convince consumers of the product's efficiency by creating the illusion of instant and radical transformation. Manipulation method is used to create an idealized image, using emotions (insecurity, envy), making false promises of improvement.

2. Illustrations in scientific articles: misrepresentation of data. Graphs and diagrams used to present scientific data can be intentionally distorted to support a particular conclusion. For instance, changing the scale of axes, using incorrect colours, or manipulating data format. The goal is to convince consumers of the product's safety and efficiency by using the authority of science. Manipulation method is used to distort the visual representation of data, mislead the audience by creating a false impression of the significance of the results.

3. Use of colour to create a certain impression. For example, using red colour in illustrations related to political protests to create the impression of aggression and violence, even if the protest was peaceful. Conversely, using soothing pastel tones in drug advertisements to evoke feelings of trust and safety. Manipulation method is used to have a psychological impact of colour, creating an emotional response, association with certain concepts.

4. Removing an image from context. For example, using a photograph of a peaceful rally, but accompanied by text claiming it's a "riot and pogrom". The image itself does not contain signs of violence, but the combination with false context completely changes its meaning. Manipulation method is used to give misinformation, false attribution, playing on audience biases.

5. Creating "fake" illustrations. For example, generating images using Artificial Intelligence depicting non-existent events or people. These images can look very realistic and be used to spread misinformation on social media. Manipulation method is used to give misinformation, forgery of evidence, creating a false impression of reality.

In these examples, illustration manipulation is used to achieve specific goals: increasing sales, strengthening power, inciting a "desired position and point of view", creating a desired image of an object.

What are manipulations in reality, and can we protect ourselves from their influence?

Manipulation in psychology, including in the media context, is a hidden influence on the audience's consciousness to induce certain thoughts, emotions, and actions in the manipulator's interest. That is, using stimuli that predetermine the reaction and are used specifically to evoke such a reaction. Manipulation does not form reactions but influences already formed ones. If you think that buying a new comfort-class car will make you happy, then the advertisement will tell you exactly that. Manipulation always builds on your attitude towards everything said and shown. Intelligence agents first look for the weakest points in the candidate's personality and then begin to develop them. One candidate is greedy for money, another is love-loving, a third is overly narcissistic and ambitious. In each case, the manipulator gives them what they want to receive: money, beautiful women, admiration [5].

The nature of manipulation consists of a double message — along with the direct open message, the manipulator sends a coded signal to the person, hoping that this signal will awaken in the person's mind the images that the manipulator needs. This hidden influence relies on the person's ability to create images in their mind that affect their feelings, opinions, and behaviour. The art of manipulation is to channel the imagination process in the right direction without the person noticing the hidden influence [6]. Manipulation is in demand now more than ever. The media strive to sell as much advertising as possible along with the hot news. High viewing figures mean large advertising budgets. Each view is converted into audience loyalty and then into money. And in the digital era, illustrations are more relevant than ever for this tool. Illustrations are not neutral; they always carry certain meanings and ideologies. Visual images can persuade; they can evoke emotions, form beliefs, and influence behaviour.

Discussion and Conclusion. Illustration, as a means of communication, is very convenient. It can be very information-rich: through various details, it can convey many meanings, and their shades simultaneously. It's often much easier for people to draw something than to explain it in words. A word is a more abstract sign than an image, and therefore it is more difficult to perceive.

In advertising, an illustration performs two main functions: the function of a signal to attract attention; here it is not so important how well the illustration fits the meaning, its size, contrast, in other words, volume is what is important. This is enough to attract attention. Whereas, while creating an image of the advertised object, it is important to convey emotions, play on one's feelings, which should encourage a person to take an action (for example, to purchase). If in the first case the idea and beauty have no force, then here, on the contrary, attractiveness and semantic connection are primary [7].

The illustrator in his work should perform both of these functions equally.

It is important to remember that images can hide signs, messages, prejudices. To protect against manipulative influence, it is necessary to develop critical thinking, observe "digital hygiene", and learn media literacy. Learn to analyse visual images — angles, colours, accents, correlate text with an image. To protect against manipulative influence in the media, media literacy and critical thinking are necessary. It is important to learn to look for different points of view: find and compare different sources, find original sources, links and official data, check facts and information for reliability. An interdisciplinary approach is necessary to continue research on the role of illustrations in media manipulation — psychology, sociology can be the basis for understanding the foundations of public opinion formation. Responsibility of content creators is important in using visual elements. Ethical coverage of events and honest and open provision of access to information can contribute to a healthy atmosphere not only in the media, but also in the daily lives of readers.

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