E-ISSN: 2360 – 6754; ISSN-L: 2360 – 6754

European Journal of Law and Public Administration

2019, Volume 6, Issue 2, pp. 203-212

https://doi.org/10.18662/eljpa/97

CONTEMPORARY FORMS AND STRATEGIES OF DISCURSIVE MANIPULATION: STORYTELLING OR THE ART OF TELLING STORIES ON THE PUBLIC STAGE

Daniela CĂTĂU VEREȘ

Covered in:

CEEOL, Ideas RePeC, EconPapers, Socionet, HeinOnline

Published by:
Lumen Publishing House
on behalf of:
Stefan cel Mare University from Suceava,
Faculty of Law and Administrative Sciences,
Department of Law and Administrative Sciences

CONTEMPORARY FORMS AND STRATEGIES OF DISCURSIVE MANIPULATION: STORYTELLING OR THE ART OF TELLING STORIES ON THE PUBLIC STAGE

Daniela CĂTĂU VEREŞ[1]

Abstract

In the development of humanity and society in general, communication has always played an essential role. The forms that it takes are determined by the relationships between individuals (power, affection, decision, information, etc.), but communication can also be viewed in terms of the purpose with which one form or another is used in social structures. Moreover, the tools or means used in the communication process are decisive in discursive analysis, contributing to the identification of the exposed message or the hidden intention. Whatever the purpose of communication, the intention is one: to convince something and possibly to incite action. In this sense, communication has common boundaries with manipulation in the public space. Because of their frequent use in the public space, these two seemingly banal terms, communication and manipulation, hide complex linguistic and psychological mechanisms.

Keywords

Communication; storytelling; manipulation; discursive analysis; public space; brainwashing; political communication; advertising speech; promotional discourse.

In the development of humanity and society in general, communication has always played an essential role. The forms that it takes are determined by the relationships between individuals (power, affection, decision, information, etc.), but communication can also be viewed in terms of the purpose with which one form or another is used in social structures. Moreover, the tools or means used in the communication process are decisive in discursive analysis, contributing to the identification of the exposed message or the hidden intention. Whatever the purpose of communication, the intention is one: to convince something and possibly to incite action. In this sense, communication has common boundaries with

[1] Lecturer, PhD, Stefan cel Mare University from Suceava (ROMANIA)

manipulation in the public space. Because of their frequent use in the public space, these two seemingly banal terms, communication and manipulation, hide complex linguistic and psychological mechanisms. The spread of the concept of manipulation is recognized according to the terms that revolve around it: rumour, misinformation, indoctrination, intoxication, plot, conspiracy, etc. But what is discursive manipulation actually?

When we say manipulation we mean actually a communicative practice with ancient roots, common with that of humanity. Despite its age, it is proving to be a topical practice, reinvented endlessly. If the Latin etymology defines it as the act of "handling, manoeuvring", dictionaries also specify the meaning of "influencing by various means how to think and act of a person or a community" [1]. This last aspect is the basis of our analysis, in which we will identify the forms, strategies, fields of action and the effects of manipulation in the public space. Over time, philosophers of language, sociologists, writers, journalists have identified and described this phenomenon, starting with Plato and Aristotle, passing through Orwell and reaching Patrick Charaudeau [2], Christian Salmon [3] and Philippe Breton [4], great analysts of contemporary discourse, or Michel Foucault [5], Roland Barthes [6] and Paul Ricoeur [7]. Numerous studies have highlighted the existence of forms of social interaction arising from systems of power, conflicts of interest, and relationships of developed forces pronouncing from language, from the hierarchy of society and from personal or professional objectives of individuals. The most common forms of manipulation in the public space would thus be found in the political, promotional and advertising discourse. These are achieved with the help of the word, gestures, image and storytelling. This last means of manipulation especially holds our attention, being a contemporary concept present in marketing, in the management of the company and in the political discourse, relying on the power of seduction and conviction, therefore on the exploitation of emotion in communication.

Manipulation as a form of communication: definition and diachronic perspective

Fabrice d 'Almeida, in his work *La Manipulation* [8 : 127], proposes a periodization in the appearance of manipulation in society. If, in Antiquity, Plato recommended the use of rhetoric and myth to stop urban emigration, in the Middle Ages obtaining one's consent was a goal in itself, regardless of means. Then, in the Age of Lights, the Church gives priority to a policy of "transparency", and the State realizes that it must become more subtle, which leads to the emergence of the print media. However, manipulation in

the public space will become evident with the birth of liberalism in the nineteenth century, when, according to Karl Marx, the industrial revolution leads to subjection towards the production apparatus, the proletariat becoming in the opinion of the modern slave that sells its force of work, thus changing the freedom for food. In the twentieth century, manipulation is of a psychological or mental nature, the totalitarian countries resorting to "brainwashing" and indoctrination techniques, and more recently speaking of terms such as "psychological submission" in French law or "kidnapping the soul" in ethnopsychiatry [9 : 376].

Being a form of communication, manipulation as a process is built on the basis of the communication process represented by the sender, receiver and message. However, these three elements were easily renamed by Patrick Charaudeau [10], [13], who talks about the producing instance and the receiving instance, the massage being the advertising, political or promotional speech. A communication contract is established between these three elements. But manipulation occurs when communication is not based on arguments. So how manipulation should be defined to render its substance? Philippe Breton notes that "manipulation consists in constructing an image of the real that appears to be real" [4: 18]. The stake in defining this notion is psychological in nature, because all means are mobilized in manipulation to reach the control and influence of thought, choices, of a person's actions, either through the logic of power or through influence, reaching depersonalization. The manipulator will thus appeal to *ethos* and *pathos* in order to convince, seduce and consent to the other. In addition, manipulation implies a lack of arguments, a transparent motivation, replaced by deception, because behind this process lies a hidden cause. The art of manipulating is actually depriving the manipulated person of liberty without realizing it, convinced that he is free to choose. In the process of manipulation in the public space, besides deception, we find methods such as misinformation and indoctrination, the latter wanting to be a form of long-term education and acting on a person's beliefs and intelligence. Disinformation, on the other hand, is considered as the most difficult form of manipulation to identify in the contemporary society invaded by information [4 : 106-107].

In fact, to define manipulation, the researchers consider that three conditions must be met: physical constraint, economic domination and authority report, discussing the idea of freedom of the individual, directly implying his need for belonging and recognition. And the very essence of manipulation is the concealment of the truth behind a "pompous vocabulary". Regarding the methods used over time, these are different,

from Pavlov's conditioning reflex, going through the PDH (Pain-Drug-Hypnosis method used in North Korea on prisoners), through the MK-ULTRA project (of CIA in the 1950s using injections with psychotropic substances in mental manipulation), through the subliminal messages from 1950s in France (broadcasting on television some short messages for a few seconds, to be barely consciously aware, as was the image of Mitterand), without forgetting manipulation through fear and violence, brainwashing or ethnotherapy (closely related to psychology and psychoanalysis), we arrive at storytelling [11 : 24-25] or the method of communication based on a narrative structure (appeared in the mid-1990s in the United States).

The instance of a manipulative speech and the communication contract

The communication situation specific to the manipulation first implies the psycho-socio-discursive intention to incite the other to do something. This intention is called by Patrick Charaudeau [12] "intent to incite to do" ("inciter à faire"), conditioned by the presence of the other, of a situation of communication with one's own constraints (existence of a communication contract), of the idea of credibility with reference to the speaking subject. Credibility is confirmed by its image (*ethos*), which makes it possible to "touch the affection" of the other to seduce or persuade (*pathos*). Because in order to "incite to do", one must first go through "make believe" (fr. "faire croire"), and the manipulative subject will use narrative or argumentative strategies to influence the manipulated subject. In other words, the principle of functioning of manipulation in the political and commercial scene involves three basic elements: the producing instance, which will use or propose an imaginary or narrative framework that evokes a lack and receptive instance, permeable to the solutions and arguments proposed to meet the need. Obviously, we must also mention here the instance of opposition (the political opponent or the competitor) and the instance of mediation (which ensures the transmission of the message: TV, radio, press, etc.). The political, advertising and promotional discourse of prevention correspond faithfully to this functional scheme. The most eloquent case is that of anti-aging cosmetics that sends the public the lack (aging), asks for confirmation ("you cannot deny this reality"), proposes the solution (an anti-aging cream), excludes the competitors ("X cream is the only one that will give you allows you to look 2 years younger").

In the public space, the producing or issuing court of a manipulative speech organizes its speech according to strategies that respond to the demands of simplifying the message, relying more on emotions than on

reason. In addition, simplification is accompanied by repetition, which is essential in fixing the message in the subconscious of the receiving instance. In addition, to be credible, the producing instance must prove its legitimacy. If in the advertising discourse its legitimacy is confirmed by the positioning on the market, in the promotional discourse of prevention the legitimacy comes from the ethical ideal that the instance promotes from a social moral stance. The manipulated subject or the receiving instance will therefore answer a call in the name of social solidarity. As for the political discourse, the producing instance relies on persuasion and seduction to conquer power with popular acceptance and to determine the receiving instance to join. In all three types of discourse, the producing instance has the interest to create a credible image based on politics, for example, on the relativization of the truth, public employment and belief. An example of popular success are in France J. M. Le Pen [14] and the current president, Emmanuel Macron, both recognized as having the power to convince and attract impressive masses. The credible image must be accompanied by strategies for processing the emotions (*pathos*), which, in the manipulative public discourse, is based on the controversy and dramatization, starting with the description of the evil and its causes (social inequality, for example, or the exodus of young people from Romania on the labour market in the EU), the exaltation of values (through promises and prophesying scenarios), the appeal to the people (by provoking a collective impulse of a purely sentimental order). However, the discursive strategy recognized to be among the most effective over time in these three types of public discourse is *storytelling*.

Storytelling in public discourse and other forms of contemporary manipulation

If we were to limit ourselves to the strategies of discursive manipulation in the very recent contemporary public space, two concepts should be evoked: storytelling [15], [16][2] and "peopling" actors in the political sphere. Both strategies aim to process the emotions of the manipulated instances, first by using narrative techniques with a strong

[2] The concept of "storytelling" is promoted by Christian Salmon in the article "Une machine à fabriquer des histoires" in *Le Monde diplomatique*, November 2006, and "peopling" is a concept belonging to Alexandru Dorna, described in the article "Discours de propagande et techniques de manipulation" consulted on September 28, 2019 at https://www.fssp.uaic.ro/argumentum/numarul%207/03_Dorna_tehno_final.pdf

emotional impact on the public, the second, equal to the force, aims to create an image of an election campaign for politicians through media exhibitionism. Candidates such as Sarkozy, Ségolène Royal, Barak Obama have repeatedly revealed in the press people or TV studios details of their personal lives, appearing with their life partners or being photographed with personalities from the public sphere, thus leaving to carry out a transfer of popularity and credibility in the consciousness of the manipulated court, in order to obtain its membership. This exercise of image would guarantee for the moment the popular success, regardless of the subsequent evolution of the candidate's personal situation. As Alexandru Dorna points out, "emotion, when used for propaganda purposes, paralyzes the critical spirit of the audience and causes a transfer of affective load. Advertising uses and abuses this procedure: to sell everything provided that the product is associated with a strong dose of sensuality (...) and suffering (...) "[16]. Fear and joy are the two main emotions targeted by the manipulative discourse, capable of snatching the adhesion of the receiving instance. And if they add a story, an image and gestures, success is guaranteed. In politics, the Nazi pathos will remain in history as the perfect means of transmitting pathological fear, just as the success of the Coca-Cola Company or of the president of the United States was the source of a life story told at the right time.

Whether it is political speech, advertising or promotional prevention (anti-defrauding, anti-smoking or fire prevention campaigns, etc.), the art of telling stories guarantees the success of the campaign. Appeared in the USA in the 1990s, this discursive strategy quickly and definitively enters in marketing, business management and political communication, presenting a power of seduction and unquestionable conviction. This technique is based on "capturing attention, stimulating the desire for change and convincing through the use of appropriate arguments" [17][3]. Of course, the story meant to bring about change of thinking and decision-making has a life story told in an emotional register appropriate to the context. In advertising, these elements add credibility to the company based on the longevity of the business. In politics, credibility is confirmed by authority or celebrity, to which is added the emotional dimension of family stories, transformed into myth through the complicity of the media and the advisers in communication (spin doctors). The first political personality to use

[3] According to Stephen Denning, *The secret Language of Leadership*, Jossey Bass, 2007. In c In his book, he theorizes the concept of storytelling in communication, mentioning that the use of narrative formulas following the model of children's stories would seduce and persuade the public, causing an open spirit to the message conveyed.

storytelling in the election campaign was Ronald Reagan in the USA. Since then, this technique has been perpetuated and spread all over the world. But what is noteworthy in the American electoral political discourse, is just the beginning by evoking a life story either from USA history or about a person raised to the status of national hero. These stories are meant to remove the boundaries between real and fiction, between true and false, whether it is commercial or political discourse. Stories are therefore used to better sell a product, to capture attention, to belittle an action of the rulers, mobilizing emotions and inciting action. In the history of political communication, President Bush's 2001 speech in which he presented his cabinet begins as follows: "Every person has his own story that is unique, all stories tell what America can and should be" [3]. In this speech for several minutes, Bush used the word "story" ten times, a strategy recommended by his communications advisers, generalized in the public space especially by the heads of companies to mobilize the emotions of the employees. As Christian Salmon notes in his book on storytelling, even reporters have embraced narrative journalism, psychologists narrative therapy; even the legal science "lives out of the story", "and the narrative presentation of the events invades the court decisions". Even online video games combine the humanitarian, political and ideological causes in which players must rise up as the saviour of a population on an imaginary island that is the prey of hunger[4].

In the advertising discourse, storytelling is even more present, promoting the transition from the logo or the image of a brand, to the story of a brand as a success story (see here the story behind Apple's Steve Jobs, personally told by the brand's creator in public space in 2005, when Stanford University was invited to hold the speech at the end of the university year, which lasted 15 minutes and remained in history for the three moving stories presented[5]) [18]. But beyond emotions, the intent of the storytelling discourse remains one of manipulation, conviction, obtaining affective adhesion and determining action.

Let's take a current example from advertising: the EDF campaign in France, whose slogan is "Let's change energy together". Beyond the employee of the company that appears on the poster as a person trying to protect the environment, there is also the story of a woman impressed in childhood by a wind turbine. As an adult, she will get to manage a wind farm. The life of this woman is given as a model, to change the consumption

[4] Video game proposed by the UN as part of a hunger control program.

[5] The speech can be viewed at https://descopera.info/blog/discursul-lui-steve-jobs-de-la-universitatea-stanford-din-2005/

habit of the public. The stakes of this advertising spot are actually two-fold: creating a brand image that protects the environment and attracting or retaining customers.

This dual-purpose communication strategy is frequently found in advertising discourse. We will take another example, from the Romanian advertising space, which appears on the site publicitate.tv as "one of the most exciting Romanian ads" [19], entitled "Butterfly", appeared in 2011 for the COSMOTE Brand, realized by the advertising agency Papaya Advertising. It is a discussion between an elderly father and his son. The father asks his son three times "What is this?" with reference to a butterfly. The son, angry, abruptly talks to him. Then, through an impressive time-lapse effect, the father projects his son into his childhood, reminding him of the answer the son had received to the same question, but benefiting from the patience and love of the father. The emotional impact is maximum, the receiver opening up completely to receive the final message: "We are given so much time to talk ... We never have time to listen. Cosmote". In this case, the opening is twofold: towards a psycho-social moral and a brand image that promotes human communication.

Conclusions

More than just a skill, manipulative speech is a complex system of communication that engages linguistic constructions meant to standardize the thinking and choices of the manipulated subjects, according to the psycho-social and ideological intention of the speaker. Used in marketing, in political communication, in promoting moral or social values or in the fight against scourges that threaten humanity, the manipulative discourse is based on the same action strategies, raised to the art rank, in various fields, harmoniously combining the power of the word with that of the image and the story of life become myth in the collective consciousness. All strategies of manipulative discourse are art: the art of telling stories, the art of using life experience to humanize a reality, the art of comparing the incomparable (in politics, in marketing, etc.), the art of lying or deceiving public opinion in order to control better; the art of organizing and presenting the real-imaginary confusion, the art of reducing silence, the art of depersonalizing the Man, the art of selling through illusions, etc. The manipulative discourse in the process of human communication first deals with the emotions, then the promotion of the intention to act or the request of the manipulated adhesion. Because through emotions the opponent or otherness is best mastered, while relying on the simplification of the message and its repetition. Based on truthful arguments and a clear communication contract

between the partners, the speech becomes persuasive, but not manipulative. Only incomplete communication (misinformation) or the one that hides the truth becomes manipulation. In contemporary society, the play of discursive masks in the public space, with the implicit one left to understand, sometimes makes it difficult to identify the border between manipulation and communication.

REFERENCES

[1] Dictionarul explicativ al limbii române
[2] Charaudeaux P. Grammaire du sens et de l'expression. Paris, Hachette; 1992.
[3] Salmon C. Storytelling la machine à fabriquer des histoires et à formater les esprits. Paris, France: La Découverte; 2007.
[4] Breton, P. La Parole manipulée, Paris, France: La Découverte, coll. "Poche"; 2000.
[5] Foucault M. Dits et Ecrits, 1978-1988, Quatro Gallimard, Paris; 2001.
[6] Barthes R. L'Analise structurale des récits. Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1981 or Mythologies, Paris: Seuil; 1957
[7] Ricoeur P. Temps et récit, Paris, France: Seuil; 1983.
[8] D'Almeida F. La Manipulation. Paris, France: Presses Universitaires de France; 2011.
[9] Esquerre A. La Manipulation mentale : Sociologie des sectes en France, Paris, France: Fayard, coll. "Histoire de la pensée"; 2009.
[10] Charaudeau P. "Le contrat de communication dans une perspective langagière : contraintes psychosociales et contraintes discursives", accessed on November 4, 2019 on the site Patrick Charaudeau - Livres, articles, publications. Available at: http://www.patrick-charaudeau.com/Le-contrat-de-communication-dans,89.html
[11] Bollon P. "Le Storytelling" ou l'art du mensonge? In Le Magazine Littéraire; 2010, No 471, 1er janvier: 24-24.
[12] Charaudeau P. "Le discours de manipulation entre persuasion et influence sociale", Actes du colloque de Lyon; 2009, accessed on November 4, 2019 on the site Patrick Charaudeau - Livres, articles, publications. Available at: http://www.patrick-charaudeau.com/Le-discours-de-manipulation-entre.html
[13] Bromberg M & Trogon A. (dir.). Paris, France: Dunod; 2004, accessed on November 4; 2019 on the site Patrick Charaudeau - Livres, articles, publications. Available at: http://www.patrick-charaudeau.com/Le-contrat-de-communication-dans,89.html

[14] Le Pen JM. Déclaration sur la jeunesse, la situation politique et la démographie; [Internet] 13 mai 1984; Paris; La Documentation française. Available at: https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/126820-declaration-de-m-jean-marie-le-pen-president-du-front-national-sur-la

[15] Salmon C. "Une machine à fabriquer des histoires" in Le Monde diplomatique; November 2006.

[16] Dorna A. "Discours de propagande et techniques de manipulation". Available at: https://www.fssp.uaic.ro/argumentum/numarul%207/03_Dorna_tehno_final.pdf

[17] Denning S. The secret Language of Leadership. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass; 2007.

[18] Steve Jobs's speech. Available at: https://descopera.info/blog/discursul-lui-steve-jobs-de-la-universitatea-stanford-din-2005/

[19] Pub Tv. Una dintre cele mai emotionante reclame românești. Fluture, Romania; 2012. Available at: https://www.publicitate.tv/una-dintre-cele-mai-emotionante-reclame-romanesti/?playlist=209