PSYCHOLOGICAL MECHANISMS OF THE MEDIA INFORMATION REPRESENTATION IN THE VIRTUAL SPACE OF THE XXI CENTURY

N. Guslyakova¹, A. Guslyakova²

¹ South Ural State University of Humanities and Education (RUSSIAN FEDERATION)
² RUDN University, Moscow State Pedagogical University (RUSSIAN FEDERATION)

Abstract

The contemporary media world of the first quarter of the XXIst century aims not only to highlight the diverse human activities, but also to contribute to their further development, thereby acting as an indicator of the evolution of human consciousness. The modern media have a powerful influence in shaping people's lives and they are also influential in the way they facilitate the spread of culture and lifestyle. People have come to depend on the media world for information, education and entertainment, and in doing so the individuals let the media affect the important aspects of their lives. Hence, in terms of functionality the present-day media can be compared with a sort of the information matrix that purposefully and deliberately penetrates into human nature while dissolving and transforming it from inside. And therefore, the principle objective of the media as a conductor of the information policy is to continuously influence the consciousness and personal experience of the individual [1].

That is why, our study focuses on analyzing such a scientific phenomenon as psychological mechanisms of the mass media information presentation which are based on cognitive, affective and behavioral spheres of the human consciousness.

Special psychological mechanisms questionnaires and surveys were designed and conducted to estimate the level of influence of each psychological mechanism of the media information presentation by interviewing Russian students in three higher education institutions: RUDN University, Moscow State Pedagogical University (Moscow); and South Ural State University of Humanities and Education (Chelyabinsk). University students' media perception and everyday experience were used as predictor and criterion variables in a series of quantitative and qualitative analyses. The findings managed to show the interrelation of the psychological mechanisms of the media information presentation in the present-day virtual reality and their increasing influence on the human consciousness and people's perception of the modern social environment.

Keywords: psychological mechanisms, the media information, virtual reality, psychological setting, reflexion, goal setting, professional self-esteem, adaptation.

1 INTRODUCTION

The evolution of the media in the first decade of the twenty-first century transforms significantly the individual's perception of the world and rebuilds his relationships and interaction with the media themselves. Traditional printed newspapers and magazines are being more and more substituted by the their digital or networked counterparts. Networked journalism in the present context is not the same as the traditional journalism. The former is understood to retain such essential functions as reporting, analyzing and commenting, filtering, editing and disseminating [2]. In the case of networked journalism, throughout the process of news production, the use of digital and online technologies is at the heart of the process of newsgathering, processing and dissemination. The news process itself, however, changes from a linear to a networked process, whereby there is constant communication and interaction with information. As a result, a new separate phenomenon emerges which we may define as a “new media discourse” [3]. The term “new media discourse” means more than just the traditional communication of the press with its deadlines and top-down reporting. In contrast, being a key product of the networked journalism [4] “the new media discourse” is available at all hours of the day and it is interactive. The Internet and its applications, including blogs, web sites, and online social networks or cyber communities, represent a huge change for the media. It is clear that online spaces for discussion and dialogue are playing an increasingly significant role in people's lives where they have affordable access to such spaces [5]. Therefore, in terms of functionality the present-day media discourse can be compared with a sort of the information matrix that purposefully and deliberately penetrates into human nature while dissolving and transforming it from inside. And therefore, the
principle objective of the media as a conductor of the information policy is to continuously influence the
consciousness and personal experience of the individual.

Thus, the new media space in our centenary focuses on reaching the cognitive, affective and
behavioral spheres of the human consciousness. Its key principle is to exploit the psychological
mechanisms of the individual’s mind and through them to understand a modern human’s dreams,
ambitions or needs and to further make an impact on them.

2 THE NEW MEDIA SPACE OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM

It is common knowledge that the new media of our epoch are characterized by their ability to influence
the target audience interactively, immediately and imperceptibly; synchronously and asynchronously.

One of the most popular theories to be inspired by the new media is the principles of “the attention
economy” [6]. The idea of this theory lies in the fact that at the age of information overload, not only
the perceived information plays a key role in human minds, but also the amount of attention it can
attract: both cognitive and social attention.

The following mass media approach has a strong impact on the present-day human generation. A
simple online navigation, an easy and quick round the clock access to unlimited information resources
as well as multitasking (the simultaneous management of multiple activities) [7] in a virtual space
becomes more and more popular and in demand among people.

The present-day mass media, whether they are favorable or unfavorable, are able to encourage and
motivate people in their political, social, academic and professional activities because people utilize
the media space on a daily basis. Therefore, many researchers have been diving into a considerable
amount of studies on how the new media world influences the human consciousness and what
psychological mechanisms stand behind this enormous impact.

Taken into account our colleagues’ experience and the observations which reveal the new media
information representation, it is necessary to study and analyze the level of the new media influence
on the consciousness of the human minds in the modern world.

Therefore, our research introduces the working hypothesis which says that psychological mechanisms
of the media information representation in the virtual space have a hierarchic structure with a
psychological setting at the top and other key mechanisms related to it: reflection, goal setting,
professional self-esteem and adaptation [8]. The influence of the above mentioned psychological
mechanisms on the media information representation takes place under the effect of exterior and
interior social, political and economic factors and conditions.

3 PSYCHOLOGICAL MECHANISMS AND THEIR APPLICATION IN THE MEDIA
WORLD

Our study aims at revealing the system of psychological mechanisms that ensures the new media
information presentation in line with the demands of the modern society.

The problem of psychological mechanisms has been carefully investigated by a wide range of
scholars. And although it is widely acknowledged that psychological mechanisms are a complex
structural component of the integral part of consciousness, there is neither common definition of the
psychological mechanism, nor summarized analysis of the psychological mechanisms in their unity.

The literature review of the problem of psychological mechanisms represents various viewpoints of
their definition. Thus, the mechanisms are observed as methods of transforming and organizing the
personality [9]; as a regular correlation of factors, means and conditions [10]; as a complex of inner
logical links and procedures [11].

We suggest that the psychological mechanism is a complex, internal, integral structure of the
personality’s consciousness. It represents the set of inner mental transformations (structures, links,
relations), which, considering factors and conditions, ensure the formation of the individual’s
consciousness and the emergence (on that basis) of changes in the person’s behavior and in the level
of his inner potential. The backbone of the psychological mechanisms of the human consciousness is
deep and internal work. It results in regrouping the elements of consciousness and transforming the
structure of existing correlations that get a dynamic character through this process. System-building,
content-rich characteristic is an inner mental activity. It leads to the reorganization of the personality’s
semantic structures which are connected with the changes of the individual's consciousness that are necessary for ensuring the productive social and professional activity. As a result, the significant correlations between psychological mechanisms and structural components of the human consciousness grow and intensify encouraging the increase of its development level.

We hypothesize that there is a hierarchal system of psychological mechanisms productively influencing the development of the human consciousness with a basic mechanism of psychological setting which is linked to the mechanisms of reflexion, goal-setting, professional self-esteem and adaptation. It is possible to optimize the above mentioned mechanisms providing that specially organized integral learning with its active forms and methods is used.

Taking into account the role of the contemporary media world and its intention to dominate in an average person's life, we assume that the activation of the above-mentioned psychological mechanisms is used in the media information representation.

The psychological setting is considered to be the basic mechanism of the media usage and it is observed as a potential and actual power ensuring the success of any human activity. The psychological setting does not only mean the individual's stable readiness to act in a certain manner in a certain direction, but also it correlates with all the singled-out mechanisms as a basic mechanism of the individual's formation of professional consciousness.

The effectiveness of the mechanism of reflexion in the formation of the human consciousness is expressed in the person's ability to take an active research position towards himself and his activity. Reflexion makes the individual understand his or her capabilities. People realize their personal and professional goals, tasks and conditions of their further development and activity.

Goal setting is an important psychological mechanism of the development of the individual's consciousness. Some scholars believe that "the goal is a possible image of the real prototype" [12]. Besides clear goals increase persistence and self-efficacy, making individuals less susceptible to the undermining effects of anxiety, disappointment, and frustration [13]. It is essential to mention that social cognitive theory states that goals increase people's cognitive and affective reactions to performance outcomes because goals specify the requirements for personal success. Goals also prompt self-monitoring and self-judgements of performance attainments [14], [15], [16].

The mechanism of professional self-esteem means either the evaluation of separate individual's human and professional qualities and actions or his or her overall self-esteem. Firstly, this mechanism helps to organize and self-regulate professional and personal activity and behavior based on rules and values in the modern society. Secondly, it influences the dynamics of mastering personal and professional skills and adjusts the probability of goal achievement. Finally, it stimulates self-confidence, personal and professional satisfaction and the success of life adaptation.

The mechanism of adaptation encourages individuals in their self-discovery, in building new forms of interpersonal relationships, being a part of professional and social activity. It also helps to form an active social position while solving different professional and life problems. Besides, it is the level of adaptation development that determines the general activity of the human consciousness and opportunities of its productive transformation. The formation of the person's consciousness is based on functioning of the hierarchically-built system of the singled-out psychological mechanisms that have a different level of generality and concretism at different stages of the human development.

Overall, the new media involves complex relationships between large sets of interacting variables that are crudely designated by the terms “digital media”, “information”, “society”, “audiences” and the psychological mechanisms of their perception. It is through taking these sets of variables into account individually, interactively and systematically that an integral perception of the media information representation can be gained.

4 METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

Because of the influential role the mass media, and the virtual media in particular, play in society, understanding the psychological mechanisms through which symbolic communication influences human thought, affect, and action is of considerable importance [17]. While people today live in a media saturated world and the media play a major role in their development, there is an important lack of knowledge regarding the psychological mechanisms in so called new, digital, or interactive media use among individuals, especially among the youth.
To analyze an intricate structure of the psychological mechanisms of the media information representation a number of special surveys were conducted. We assume that the highest level of dependence on the present-day media world is mostly observed among the younger generation of millennials altering young people’s beliefs, feelings and behavior due to their more sensitive nature and certain naivety because of lack of life experience. That is why our participants became bachelor’s and master’s students of three Russian universities (South Ural State University of Humanities and Education (SUSUHE), Chelyabinsk; Moscow State Pedagogical University (MSPU) and Peoples’ Friendship University of Russia (PFUR), Moscow.) The total number of respondents is 150. 70 young people study at the Faculty of Science and Technology, CSPU, while 40 respondents surveyed are the students of the Institute of Foreign languages and Philology, MSPU as well as 40 other students study at the Ecological faculty, PFUR.

We developed a special questionnaire to estimate the young people’s attitude towards the media world and especially towards the virtual media space. On a 4-point scale ranging from ‘1’ (never) to ‘4’ (always) young people were asked if they read newspapers and magazines; if they are interested in local and world news; what information they find credible and significant for them; if information technologies help the students in their academic study and future career choice, etc.

The survey helped us to prove that the key psychological mechanisms which are psychological setting, reflexion, goal-setting, professional self-esteem and adaptation function as one unit set and present the media information according to the needs and demands of the younger generation.

The correlation analysis was conducted at the p< .05 significance level. A summary of this analysis is shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable (var) and its definition</th>
<th>Marked correlations are significant at p &lt; .05000 N=150 (Casewise deletion of missing data)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Correlation links</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>var 1 (traditional newspapers and magazines)</td>
<td>var 19 (0.47); var 21 (0.38); var 23 (0.32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>var 3 (online reviews, comments)</td>
<td>var 6 (0.36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>var 5 (social networks)</td>
<td>var 14 (0.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>var 6 (mass media frequency use)</td>
<td>var 3 (0.36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>var 8 (mass media credibility)</td>
<td>var 11 (0.34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>var 10 (knowledge of foreign languages)</td>
<td>var 11 (0.57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>var 11 (foreign media reading and understanding)</td>
<td>var 8 (0.34); var 10 (0.57); var 12 (0.42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>var 12 (the English language and its cultural and business dominance)</td>
<td>var 11 (0.42); var 13 (-0.38); var 21 (0.36); var 23 (0.30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>var 13 (the Russian language and its cultural and business dominance)</td>
<td>var 12 (-0.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>var 14 (mass media support in students’ academic studies)</td>
<td>var 5 (0.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>var 16 (radical media space and Internet change in ten years)</td>
<td>var 18 (0.43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>var 18 (radical people’s lifestyle change in ten years)</td>
<td>var 16 (0.43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>var 19 (online newspapers and magazines, video-sharing websites)</td>
<td>var 1 (0.47); var 8 (0.41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>var 21 (students’ professional specialization)</td>
<td>var 1 (0.38); var 12 (0.36); var 22 (0.65); var 23 (0.81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>var 22 (media and Internet technologies)</td>
<td>var 23 (0.66); var 21 (0.65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>var 23 (students’ activity in the media discourse space)</td>
<td>var 1 (0.32); var 12 (0.30); var 21 (0.81); var 22 (0.66)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The data received from the correlation analysis demonstrate the students’ general psychological setting of the media information perception. There is a good correlation between variables 1 and 19 (0.47) as well as variables 19 and 8 (0.41) correspondingly (table 1). These indicators stand for students’ credibility towards the present-day media. Our research has showed that young people find the media information credible. This means that the media are adapted to meet young individuals’ needs. This is where the mechanism of adaptation functions. In our opinion the contemporary new media are “tailor-made” and while presenting different types of information they refer to the mechanism of adaptation which helps to focus on people’s ambitions, hopes and expectations.

The correlation between variables 16 and 18 (0.43) demonstrate the younger generation’s belief that the cutting-edge technologies which are currently revolutionizing the human life will radically transform the present-day virtual media space. Hence, students evaluate the new media as an instrument that is changing their lifestyle and will continue doing it in the future. The mechanism of reflexion which the dynamic nature of the virtual media introduces makes young individuals better understand themselves, their place in the modern world, their inner potential as well as social and professional perspectives.

A strong correlation between variables 22 and 23 (0.66) show that young people are highly integrated in the present-day virtual media space. They refer to the media to find answers to the questions that they have. The modern media world is not only becoming the source of the current information on different social, political and current events, but also it can be observed as a source of inspiration for many people. The modern media help a lot of people, especially young individuals, to understand what they are; what they want to be in their private and social lives; what ambitions they have and what goals they would like to achieve. Hence, the virtual media introduce and use two more psychological mechanisms – the mechanism of professional self-esteem and the mechanism of goal-setting. Both of them act as specific activities of consciousness within which there is an individual’s reflexion of his or her own activities, further development of their activity positions as well as building and achieving new personal and professional goals. Moreover, the quality of the goal setting determines the assimilation and strength level of knowledge acquisition, skills and the formation of the future expert’s competencies.

Our research demonstrates that a strong correlation between variables 21, 22 and 23 (0.65; 0.81) prove that the contemporary media and Internet technologies launch psychological mechanisms to attract their young audience and to make an impact on the youth’s consciousness. For example, students are getting extremely involved in the virtual media space, including their professional specialization. Young people find support and keys to their academic inquiries in the media space and social networks (variables 5; 14 – 0.33). The new media help young individuals to study sciences and foreign languages with the English language at the top (variables 8, 11, 12 – 0.34; 0.42). Young people begin to better understand their own national culture and the mother language by referring to the media communities, forums and live journals (variable 13).

Figure 1 below demonstrates how the new media presents the information in the digital environment by using psychological mechanisms of the human consciousness.

![Figure 1. Psychological mechanisms of the new media information presentation in the present-day digital space.](image-url)
Figure 1 shows that each piece of the information perceived should be filtered through a range of the psychological mechanisms. Firstly, it is important to build a necessary psychological setting for the person’s information comprehension. Secondly and ideally, the information should correspond to the person’s goal-setting vision. It should inspire the human to reflect on his or her social and professional life and estimate motivation, life perspectives and ambitions. Thus, the media information has to be adapted towards the individual’s perception level; towards his or her age, physical appearance; religious views; social and professional position; personal interests and plans, etc. It is essential to notice that the present-day media space manages to correspond to various social groups of people. Perhaps, this is the key to the modern media success among people living in the digital environment.

To sum up, the new media space can be regarded as a modern person’s confident because they accurately manipulate the psychological mechanisms of the human consciousness (psychological setting, reflexion, professional self-esteem, adaptation and goal-setting) and make people trust the information perceived in the virtual space of the XXIst century. Thus, our hypothesis is completely supported.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

This review of the psychological mechanisms of the new media representation is intended to contribute to our understanding of how the new media world is more and more penetrating into the human consciousness and shaping the individual’s perception of life and human being.

It is common knowledge that in the present digital era, the new media space and human activities are completely inseparable from each other. The media-centrism of the modern world makes it necessary to conduct multiple mass media studies and analyze all their components, including the psychological mechanisms of the human consciousness and interaction. In a new millennium people, especially the younger generation, are becoming dependable on the information received and posted in the media virtual environment. Thus, media messages, in this instance usually may be expected to alter audience social behavior, norms and values. The effects of the new media information representation can make a great impact on people’s needs or psychological and social characteristics. The key reason for such an intricate manipulation on the media side is the knowledge of the nature of the psychological mechanisms and their integral functioning. The psychological setting, reflexion, professional self-esteem, adaptation and goal-setting are powerful instruments of the new media information presentation. Hence, it is necessary to continue studying these mechanisms in connection with different types of the media information received and the rapid growth of the virtual space influence.

Therefore, the conceptual framework introduced in the article should be further developed, also through additional empirical research which will certainly forster a better understanding of the dynamic interactions between the digital media space and people belonging to different age groups, religions, professional and social clusters as well as the impact of the media information presentation on people living in different regions of the world and belonging to different language families and ethnic groups.

REFERENCES


