
Cultural Code in Controlling Stereotypes of Mass Consciousness

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Abstract:

The article is concerned with the problem of interrelation between mental dynamics of mass subject and functions of cultural code in the context of modern media environment. The urgency of researching a hidden control mechanism through background knowledge and mass consciousness stereotypes is determined by the fact that modern global information and communication networks transform and destabilize the sociocultural semantic space in its historically developed order.

The methodology of analyzing control of mass consciousness stereotypes is based on integration of sociocultural, semiotic, communicative aspects of studying properties of cultural code in the mass media theory. It is emphasized that code control of an individual's mentality dynamics is exercised anonymously. Knowledge of the reality where implicit instructions for an immediate perception of the world play a special role naturally forms stereotyped practices of understanding and action that are not reflected in everyday life.

Codes set a certain limit of perception of events and their evaluation, catalyze a predicted stereotyped reaction. Cultural codes based on sign-oriented symbols form a semantic matrix that communicates basic orientation in the physical and sociocultural space to an individual's subconsciousness.

This invisible framework, determinated by a sign-oriented form, ensures transmission of a socially significant meaning that is necessary for mutual understanding of people, social control of their actions and thinking. The tendency to dominate functional and adaptive rationality in the media environment is accompanied by a transformation of the world perception stereotype, erosion of semantic boundaries between the real and the virtual, the subjective and the objective.

Keywords: social control, cultural code, stereotype control, mass consciousness, media environment.

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1. Introduction

Information properties and code functions in programming the consciousness of public attract special attention of a wide range of specialists, sociologists, and cultural studies scholars regarding an intensive development of the mass media producing a virtual reality a person begins to perceive as a natural habitat (Floridi, 2014). Internet technologies are transformed into ‘vision machines’, constantly monitoring social actors in their everyday life often uncontrolled by the self-awareness. The Internet carries out ‘virtualization of view’ or a ‘synthetic vision’ objectifying observations of social actors themselves in a broader context. Machine becomes a leading all-encompassing observer of real people’s life and their perception of reality (Virilio, 2002).

The specificity of the media environment is determined by dynamic combinations of intermediary procedures and bodies wedged between the production of signs and the production of events. Interactions and mediations are technological, cultural, and social at the same time (Debray, 1996). Information as presented by the mass media permeates the entire society implementing continuous process of communication therein and transforming a personal identity. According to Jean Baudrillard, modernity is characterized by a tense opposition of the ‘crowd’ with its hyper conformity (implosiveness) and a soulless ‘system’ with its realistic statistics and indifferent code (Baudrillard, 2000). At the same time, the neutrality of codes as impersonal procedural and technical systems provides an opportunity not only for communicating images and meanings through stereotypes of perception, but also for a variability of mental representations, which is the most important condition for social communication in terms of controlling transformations of mass consciousness in a cultural community.

The masses today are understood not only as an impersonal homogeneous community of people, but also as an atomized society scattered into individual units, whose self-identification is complicated by an unstable and indefinite social basis. In the media environment, the volume of ambiguous, rapidly changing messages is growing, which makes one doubt the presence of a code in modern conditions. The visual language of cinema in its coding functions, its influence on consciousness and imagination goes beyond the limits of cinematic art, as noted by Umberto Eco (Eco, 2004).

The purpose of this research is interrelation of the mental dynamics of the mass subject and the functions of the cultural code in the conditions of the modern media environment. The objective of the article is to identify the side of the cultural code associated with controlling stereotypes of mass consciousness. In this regard, the authors turn to a comparative analysis of different code concepts in the mass media theory.

2. Literature Review

Research of the code from the standpoint of semiology and taking into account the specificity of everyday rationality is presented in the works of Bart (1989a, 1989b; 2003) and Eco (2004).

Bart emphasizes the code belonging primarily to the sphere of culture: codes are certain types of what has been already seen, already read, already done; a code is a concrete form of this ‘already’ constituting any writing (Bart, 1989a; 1989b). The world in its multitudinous linguistic terms is braided of a great multitude of cultural codes. Any author of a literary work analyzing a personal subjective world is unknowingly included in the action of a cultural code function which is imperative and in a certain way structuring the way of thinking. Different codes indicate associative fields that impose an idea of a semantic structure. Stressing the problem of a connection between the implicit functioning of a cultural code and stereotypical thinking in the context of a special role of the mass media, Bart emphasizes an apparent certainty of our ideas about the fundamental factors of order. The risk of getting bogged down in narrow stereotypes about the world is most vividly expressed by mass communication. In later works, Bart writes about freedom from the stereotype and a statement meaning representation splitting as such (Bart, 2003).

According to Umberto Eco, a code has two functionally different plans: it both promotes machine-stereotyped perception of cultural texts and opens new possibilities for their interpretation. A code prescribes rules or a form that do not exclude vague, unpredictable cases. All this will contribute to identification of stereotypes, and in the face of increasing ambiguity, polysemy of messages, through a more detailed study of the mechanism of a cultural code, it will be possible to establish feasible boundaries of creativity perceived as an act of a free, unregulated action. Signs of actual creativity, according to Eco, are found in conditions when the code is transformed in the process of breaking certain conventions while other ones are maturing. However, even in the conditions of code transformability, its necessity for the social order does not disappear. If the code is not found in the new conditions, this does not mean it does not exist. It is necessary to search for a new code and new procedures for decoding it.

An analysis of the specificity of a cultural code action in the mass media is presented in the studies of Baudrillard (2000; 2006), Luhmann (2001; 2005), Hall (2006) and Fiske (1988, 1989).

Baudrillard emphasizes the special influence of mass media, economy, and Hi-Tech on the semantics of cultural codes in relation to the unprecedented dependence of people’s behavior and their consciousness on information flows and an attention-getting technology. A special role is played by the technique of building up an artificial cultural environment where meanings of signs acquire autonomy and relativity. The main function of the cultural code is to ensure duplication of public opinion. The mass media code in mass communication technology directs consciousness to a specific way of perceiving the world, which is characterized by

dependence on commercial interests, things and ideas being branded. Mass media technologies can cause a tactile communication reaction with a virtual object, interchange the verity and falsity. The mass media code directs towards an accelerated automatic action in interactions. Mass representation is the most important persuasive means in the media environment. The ‘question/answer’ procedure acquires the meaning of an elementary basic code scheme in its function of controlling and regulating social life. The idea of Claude Lévi-Strauss, projected onto the modern media environment of mass communication, that the cultural code, which claims the inclusivity of people, their mutual understanding, and society integrity control, is structured through basic binary oppositions acting on the principle of inversion (Lévi-Strauss, 2000).

Depersonalization, uncertainty of the social subject as a characteristic feature of the modern world are explained by Luhmann by the seizure of the economy, politics, law, science by the mass media information network (Luhmann, 2005). Mind control exercised based on the mass media code is the result of the social system reproducing itself in new technological conditions. The formality and lack of the sign-oriented system underlying the code amplified by the mass media show the desire of the social system to come close to the self-reproduction of society according to the natural (biological) type. At the same time, generalized communicative codes carry out a functional control of the meaning of an action, and therefore, of a certain social order based on subjectless imperative domination (Luhmann, 2001). In understanding the power code, Luhmann emphasizes the ways of symbolizing power sources and the scope of power, rather than the choice of a subject of power, the nature of their order and desire. The code of power is aimed at a special order of things, in which the power system itself would be constitutive, superior, controlling the power capabilities of a subject.

Traditionally, the legitimacy of power used to be supported by a value consensus, while today; the defining role is played by the mass media. In power legitimization in the media space, the binary opposition of the legal and the non-legal is distanced from reliance on morality. This is declarative, according to Luhmann, of a desire of modern society for greater objectivity in assessing the reality and optimizing its functional capabilities.

3. Materials and Methods

The authors rely on the comparative method that allows one to distinguish specificity of various cultural code concepts, to consider the typology of cultural codes depending on their function in controlling stereotypes of mass consciousness.

Semiotic interpretation of a cultural code reduces it to the language that permeates all spheres of a culture (both spiritual and material ones), including both activities and institutions of social communication. The sign connects the material and spiritual, objective and subjective spheres of culture. In its form-building function,

the sign provides communication of a stereotype of perception and a thinking stereotype. In the media environment, the sign breaks away from its original meaning and cultural ontological status; it becomes influential in the semantic space of mass culture, as well as in modern forms of business and elite art.

Communicative interpretation of the code within the framework of structural functionalist approach emphasizes, first, the technological mechanism and logic of the power function of the social code implemented in the binary scheme of oppositions.

According to the authors, *the cultural semiotic model of the socio-code* is decisive. In the context of universals of culture, the codes fix the ‘body of culture’ (Stepin, 1992). It is semiotic formations that represent the most productive basis for reflection and decoding the cultural matrix. Without sign-oriented symbolism, nothing would be known about the code (Rozin, 2001).

4. Results

The typology of codes can be represented as a generalized classification based on a cognitive orientation vector in the semantic space of society. In this case, there are fundamental, sectoral, subcultural codes.

Thanks to *fundamental codes*, basic cognitive orientation in the world is carried out. For example, the basic code of a binary perception scheme allows one to navigate in physical space (distinguishing between top and bottom, right and left) and in the social space (distinguishing the oppositions allowed-not allowed, true-false). Cosmological symbolism is associated with the fundamental codes defining the archetype of a view of life.

Regulation and norm setting are associated with the function of *sectoral codes* in specific areas of culture and life spheres of society. The main purpose of these codes is the integration of sign systems of culture, as well as communication of the meaning of activity and trends of change in the historically developed cultural stereotype of perception and thinking. The sectoral codes include socio-codes identified by Mikhail Petrov: personal nominal, professional nominal, and universal conceptual hierarchically linked to a multifaceted cultural matrix thanks to the unity of language and social context (Petrov, 2004).

Subcultural codes are tied to a specific operation or semantic orientation in the semantic field and are directly related to organizing a mental action. For example, Bart in his work ‘S/Z’ distinguishes five operational codes that direct attention at interpretation of the meaning of signs.

- 1) The *hermeneutical* code distinguishes formal units through which the secret, the unknown is formulated and unraveled;

- 2) The *semantic* code produces mobile units that enter into relations with their own kind and create an atmosphere, characters, images; symbols;
- 3) The *symbolic* code creates units of a form through which an entrance to the area of the symbolic mobile field is opened;
- 4) The *proayretic* code produces actions whose sequence is based on empirical grounds;
- 5) The *cultural* code is citations as a borrowing from some areas of knowledge.

In another paper, Bart presents a different version of the basic codes that illustrate the functions of sub-codes in a area of perception and interpretation of a text (Bart, 1998b):

- 1) The *cultural* code of knowledge in the form of public representations and opinions, as well as knowledge of the culture transmitted through books, education, public relations;
- 2) The code of *communication or addressing* (the code of addressing an audience);
- 3) The *symbolic* code that provides the possibility of ‘moving the body’ to see another site of a direct expression effect;
- 4) The *actional* code of actions to maintain the certainty of a text plot;
- 5) The *Riddle* code that produces such a coherence of elements that provides an opportunity to see a puzzle and then find a solution for it.

The five codes constitute a network where any text appears to be. In this version, Bart gives special attention to the cultural code, which for him is equivalent to the code of knowledge affecting all the other codes.

Eco (2004) singled out ten basic codes as imaging tools: perception codes, transmission codes, recognition codes, tonal codes, iconic codes, iconographic codes, taste and sensitivity codes, rhetorical codes, stylistic codes, and codes of the unconscious.

Fiske (1989) proposed to allocate a wide code intended for a mass audience, and a limited one for a narrow audience. Thus, pop music belongs to the wide code, while ballet belongs to the limited code. While the limited codes are intended to fix the boundary between ‘us’ and ‘them’, the wide ones are aimed at removing boundaries and simplifying communication. In modern technology, code classification is represented by division into digital and analog codes. Digital codes control discrete units. An analog code controls a continuum and is directed towards visual perception.

Generalized codes are relevant in the context of globalization, when the boundaries of individual cultures, nations, urban and rural populations are blurred. The typology of codes allows one to clarify what changes first when the common code is transformed, which combinations of code elements will entail this or that form of code adapting to the changing world, to an individual, and to apply the ‘cultural code

method' in practice (Rapaille, 2008) as an effective method of controlling customer behavior.

5. Discussion

Considering culture as a self-renewing system, one relies on the notion of communicative codes indicating the field of possible meanings in individual understanding processes motivating targeted and actual actions within the framework of legal tradition and morality. The code classifications given above demonstrate the implicit functional character of controlling individual mental dynamics organization through thinking attitudes and perception stereotypes. Let us consider the role of the code of truth in more detail.

5.1 The Code of Truth in Controlling the Stereotype of Mass Consciousness

In historical and actual dynamics of a cultural community, the code of truth determines peculiar super-pragmatics of communication, which is manifested through rationing a psycho-emotional, a rational, and a social action. This process of rationing, which is not realized by an individual, is associated by the authors with controlling the stereotypes of perception and thinking. Cultural forms carrying the code of truth put people in a situation of understanding the world. In particular, modern authors refer the myths that contain the symbolism of elements to the primary symbols of culture that determine the archetype and the language of this community consciousness (Mamardashvili and Pyatigorskiy, 1999; Eliade, 2002). In the study of the correlation between symbol, culture, and consciousness, the genetic role of the symbols of elements is emphasized, Greek philosophy having begun with it, which initiated the formation of a new code of truth in the European culture, that is, the truth of science (Konev, 2008).

Approval of the code of truth in a culture is based on tradition, relies on faith in certain forces, and is accompanied by mythology, while the truth itself acquires a sacred character. Randall Collins offers illuminating insights into the fact that in the scientific environment, the truth is sacred. Traditional conventions and meetings of intellectuals that have certain regulations are ceremonial gatherings for worshiping a sacred object, that is, the truth (Collins, 2002). Discussions, lectures, conferences, seminars exist for the sake of finding the truth.

Truth is a symbolic mediator that determinates basic semantic settings cognitive and social practices are built around. Thus, the basis of the religious and cultural tradition is the intellectual doctrine that establishes the code of truth at the sacred level (Guénon, 2004). The scientific picture of the world forms the code of truth based on scientific rationality.

Man, according to Luhmann (2005), is always orientated by the power code indicating a system of possible communications implicitly guiding their actions and

experiences. Yet, any power requires justification and recognition by the masses, which is correlated with the process of legitimizing power based on popular confidence. The necessary and sufficient level of confidence allows the wielders and structures of power to retain the power in the community for a long time, to dictate requirements and standards of conduct that are not always popular. In the process of legitimizing power based on trust, a key role is played by cultural codes that underlie the community self-organization at the level of practical and mass consciousness. The correlation of cultural and everyday experience in the practical consciousness is seamlessly connected by the hierarchy of social bonds in a cultural community that establishes a certain semantic sphere of communication.

Justification of power always involves referring to the code of truth as a criterion that establishes a boundary in understanding the right and a wrong motive at the level of intentions, rather than concrete actions regulated by legal norms. The practice of traditional society self-preservation rests on sacred symbolism carrying a semantic matrix with embedded codes of truth and justification of power. The symbol indicates a semantic context as a potential message, induces states of consciousness and its content, that is, it acts as the language of consciousness (Mamardashvili and Pyatigorskiy, 1999). In cultural history, symbols become a window through which human consciousness is given the world in its harmony.

The appearance of symbols in a culture is associated with the language that connects the content of underlying and surface interaction with the world. The deep content of symbol is associated with sacral meanings whose traditional implication, according to René Guénon, had been already lost in the days of Antiquity (Guénon, 2004). The second level of relations with the world corresponds to the content of the natural language generated by the pragmatics of communication in the ordinary mode. Thanks to this connection, the symbol is always meaningful and involves three interpretations: profane (everyday), scientific (universal-theoretical), sacred (universal-mystical) (Beskova, 2000). Consequently, there are three truths. This knowledge is encoded, unfathomable for laypeople (those not involved in this community).

At certain stages of human history, religion appears as a universal form where the code of truth is inseparable from the moral standards and the societal norm. Moreover, the truth is fixed by a dogma the whole system of norms is built on, and is perceived as an axiom. The dynamism of our time caused by constant innovations in all spheres of public life is in violent contrast with the stability and invariability inherent in traditional epochs. A sacramental, reverent attitude towards tradition used to ensure the stability of society and continuity of generations. Maintaining the traditions, the foundations of life, and the entire structure of the universe used to be in harmony with the ideas of the man of early civilizations about knowledge that was not applied in the process of producing material goods like modern scientific knowledge is; it rather served primarily the integration of society. The tradition was

strengthened by consecrating the experience of generations and social institutions of power, dictated standards of conduct both to the monarch and all their subjects.

The weakening authority of tradition, the erosion of ideas about their sacred status is associated with development of a personal principle, a partial liberation of an individual from rigid social bonds. This tendency was clearly manifested in the framework of ancient Greek policies when for the first-time institutional freedom was formed, the first philosophical and scientific concepts appeared that changed the traditional code of truth. Having subjected ethical and religious regulations to theoretical reflection, man begins to understand their limitations and relativity. In philosophical reasoning of the Sophists, the Epicureans, and the Cynics, practically all the arguments of the theomachists and atheists of the modern age are found. The duality of the code of truth, the antinomy of faith and reason, freedom and predestination, the earthly and the heavenly, the secular and the ecclesiastical is present in the teachings of representatives of Latin patristics and scholasticism. In the modern and contemporary times, the duality of truth has led to the fact that the postmodernist principle of relativity of norms, evaluations, truths began to dominate in the European consciousness.

The symbolized code of truth inherent in tradition defines an existential sense of being, including spatial and behavioral orientations. The world appears organized and meaningful. ‘Cosmological symbolism,’ which gives the image of the world in the form of a centered ‘sacral space,’ as Mircea Eliade emphasizes, forms an inhabited world of the man of archaic society, a system of religious ideas, a model of religious and social behavior. The code of truth is so significant that it determines the basic orientations of a person in the community, their violation making existence in the world impossible (Eliade, 2002).

With the code of truth, there is also a fashion that spontaneously arises in culture. Eliade, analyzing the origins of popularity of ideas by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Claude Lévi-Strauss in the European intellectual culture of the XX century, explained it with a new vision of man, a new perspective of man in space, a new way of the world, a new ‘mythology of matter’ (Eliade, 2002). This, in the context of the current analysis, speaks of a new code of truth in the history of European culture.

5.2 Transformation of Stereotypes of Mass Consciousness in the Media Environment

In the realities of the information and communication society, the ‘interception of code’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2007) plays a special role in controlling automatic, stereotyped acts of thinking, is characterized as a ‘surplus value of the code’, ‘increasing valence’, ‘genuine evolvement’, and represents a failure of the predictable linear vector of unfolding the meaning.

Derrida (2007) sees ‘dissemination’ as a mechanism for such a ‘failure’ and the means of its implementation are words and concepts that form certain meaning-making nodes that arise in situational text reading when tuning to the semantic game of generating a meaning. These nodes of meaning-making are characterized by Derrida as ‘seething melting crucibles’. Each time they reproduce in a new way capturing the entire text.

Bart (1989a) defines the point of contact between the code and the nodes of intercepting stereotypically used meaning-making as ‘springboards of intertextuality’. The intercept nodes of the ‘already seen, already read’ contain a ‘text’ itself in its difference from the ‘piece of work’. A text, as if it was woven from different strands of fabric, is ‘an intertwinement of different voices, numerous codes, both entangled and unaccomplished’. This thought is picked up by Kristeva (2004), who reveals in the denotation procedure itself points of losing the habitual meaning or its ‘eclipse’ where the meaning becomes entangled, leaving the feeling of a ‘passionate confusion’. It is these points of denotation, according to Kristeva, that are fraught with new semantics.

From the standpoint of Bourdieu, man as a rational being creates more than they know theoretically (Bourdieu, 1994). In the field of everyday life, code and conceptual structures are not mastered in a reflexive way. The concept of ‘habitus’, introduced by Bourdieu, can be defined as a practical mechanism procedurally structuring the world. This mechanism prompts the structure to adapt flexibly to the uniqueness of an action, the subject, to an unforeseen conjunction of circumstances. What analytical thinking perceives as random, unique, falling out of regularity, as a hindrance to the order, for practical rationality can turn out to be a source of useful regulative knowledge since it can indicate limitations of the habitual frame of reference of our thinking and action, initiating a ‘transmutation’ of the socio-code (Petrov, 2004).

Each person establishes value and notional connections with the external world, that is, the social and natural environment, extensively using the resources of culture: concepts, ideas, discourses, worldview universals. Having a humanistic boundary, the universal code should not be interpreted as one-dimensional, constant for all times. At the same time, it is necessary to consider potential risks that are provoked by acts of free interpretation of codes. A transformation of the code of truth can influence the deep grounds for the very possibility of organizing human life.

Communicative-technological approach to man in theories of mass communication is determined by the idea of a typical average target object with the goal of forming a social subject oriented in a certain way in their deepest motivations. However, no less important in public policy is the axiological aspect facing the existential-axiological side of the individual’s actions. The presence of an implicit, intuitive spiritual connection between people they may not even be aware of is essential for organizing a stable social life. Its absence makes all social connections, including

governmental and political ones, loose and fleeting. The legitimacy of power is easily questioned by mass consciousness.

6. Conclusion

There are various concepts of socio-cultural code. Its essence is defined both as a reduced model of communication, and as a stable normative-value core of civilization, and a universal activity regulator, and as a way of social and genetic memory existence, and as typed forms of thought and behavior, and as *the unconscious* of a culture. Different positions in the definition of socio-cultural code converge in that this set of rules or restrictions governs the perception stereotype through a culturally conditioned sign system that carries a matrix with embedded codes. The effect of the perception stereotype and its transformation in the process of social communication is not realized.

In mass communication, which is characterized by a tendency towards the autonomy of the sign system, key functions of the socio-cultural code in controlling the stereotypes of mass consciousness indicating the boundaries of perception and thinking, as well as a certain order of changing and selecting the meanings of signs, are most pronounced. The tendency to dominate functional-adaptive rationality in the media environment allows one to distance oneself from morality. Against the background of these features, the semantic boundaries of the real and the virtual, the subjective and the objective are blurred. This creates conditions for strengthening the implicit social control through consciousness programming for certain attitudes and purposes. The code mechanism of verbal and non-verbal manipulation of mass consciousness in the media environment opens new opportunities for influencing the process of forming a worldview and self-identification contributing to the imposition of certain behavioral stereotypes using a visual technique.

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