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FUNDAMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS OF INFORMATION AND ITS ROLE IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETIES

Marine SHAHBAZYAN^{1,*} 

¹ Khachatur Abovyan Armenian State Pedagogical University, Yerevan, Armenia

* *Correspondence*

Marine SHAHBAZYAN, Gevorg Jahukyan, 167, Yerevan 0025, Armenia

E-mail:

shahbazyanmarine25@aspu.am

Abstract: The information revolution has produced a new type of society, called the information society. Researchers of all persuasions emphasize the decisive role of information and knowledge in this society. Information has always played a significant role in social development, but only true information has contributed to social progress. The principal value of information is truth. Only true information allows human beings to comprehend objective reality and to make correct decisions. In the era of information conflicts and wars, information has become a powerful tool of manipulation and propaganda. If a society is not provided with true information and is unprepared to deal with the vast and ever-growing volume of information, it loses the ability to see and understand reality, finding itself instead in an illusory world.

Keywords: information, knowledge, information society, information conflict, information war, manipulation, propaganda.

The nuances of interpreting the concept of the “information society,” as found among various researchers, do not alter the general consensus regarding the role of information. All agree in characterizing the information society as a “society of the dominance of information and knowledge”. Daniel Bell, in his *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting* (1973), did not directly equate the post-industrial society with the “information society.” Nevertheless, he explicitly noted that the role and significance of knowledge depend on the level of informatization of society. Later, in his book *The Social Framework of the Information Society*, Bell described information as the strategic resource of post-industrial

society (Bell, 1986, pp. 330–342). By “information” he understood not merely a sum of facts and data, but rather new possibilities embodied in human beings: information becomes accessible to virtually every individual, not just to a privileged class. Like Bell, Alvin Toffler also regarded information as the principal productive resource of post-industrial society, emphasizing the importance of its processing and reproduction.

The development of information and telecommunication technologies has greatly influenced the processes of creating, transmitting, and disseminating information, but the role and impact of information are by no means limited to the technical sphere. Today,

every meaningful activity is built on informational interaction. The ever-expanding technical capabilities allow individuals not only to independently select sources of information but even to create them. Theoretically, an individual with a powerful computer connected to global information networks possesses immense opportunities to disseminate information and to influence public life. Modern man is not only a consumer of information but also a creator. Contemporary society is thus characterized as saturated with information and, at the same time, dependent upon it.

“Information” is one of the fundamental concepts of modern science. This is evidenced not only by the widespread use of the term across diverse fields of knowledge, but also by the efforts of many scholars - mathematicians, philosophers, sociologists, specialists in social informatics, and others - to develop the problem of information in a comprehensive manner. The term derives from the Latin *informatio* (notification, acquaintance) (*Armenian Soviet Encyclopedia*, 1978, Vol. 4). According to the Philosophical Encyclopedic Dictionary, information is communication or notification about the state of affairs, knowledge of something transmitted by people. It is also the reduction or elimination of uncertainty resulting from a message. It is manifested through the unity of its syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic characteristics, and in its reflection of the diversity of objects and processes in both living and non-living nature (*Philosophical Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 1983, p. 217).

Norbert Wiener, founder of cybernetics, offered a concise definition: “Information is the expression of content received from the external world during our adaptation to it.” Thus, the process of obtaining and using information is simultaneously the process of adapting to the contingencies of the environment and of carrying out our activity within it (Wiener, 1968, p. 55).

The mathematician Claude Shannon understood information as knowledge that reduces or eliminates uncertainty, and he characterized the quantity of information as a function of the probability of a message. He paid special attention to clarifying the problem of communication, stating that “the fundamental problem of communication is that of reproducing at one

point either exactly or approximately a message selected at another point (Shannon, 1963, pp. 243–332)”. The so-called entropic approach to the concept of information was developed by Léon Brillouin and Shannon. The term entropy derives from the Greek *en* (inside) and *trope* (turn, transformation). In the mathematical theory of information, entropy describes the measure of uncertainty in a situation (random variable). Thus, entropy and information characterize reality in terms of chaos and order: entropy is the measure of disorder, while information is the measure of order (Brillouin, 1960, p. 56; Shannon, 1963, p. 3).

Informational activity characterizes the capacity to carry out purposive activity (Korogodin, 1983, p. 56). Examining the semantic aspect of information, three layers may be distinguished. The upper layer corresponds to the usual sense of the term - answering the question, “What is the information about?” The middle layer shows that specific information unequivocally determines the acting subject (the operator). The meaning (semantics) of information is contained in its definiteness. This middle layer is real and tangible, while the upper and lower layers are somewhat blurred, not always evident and precise.

Information is also endowed with the property of repeatability, but identical concepts, facts, assumptions, and frameworks may be used differently in different contexts. This means the same information may serve different problem-solving purposes (Korsuntsev, 1997, p. 30). The axiological (value-based) interpretation of information emphasizes its “human” dimension, focusing on the concepts of “value” and “benefit.” According to Russian researcher A. Kharkevich, “Information has great value because it makes it possible to achieve a goal. The same information may have different value if applied to different purposes (Kharkevich, 1960, p. 54)”.

The value of information lies in its importance and necessity for performing actions and making decisions. The value of any information is conditioned by social practice; practice is the fundamental objective criterion of value. Value is objective, formed through concrete socio-historical processes and interactions. Information may hold different value for different consumers depending on factors such as novelty,

clarity of presentation, complexity of expression, and the intellectual preparedness of the recipient.

It is worth noting that usefulness is one of the primary attributes of information. Usefulness, in the philosophical sense, is subjectivized value - the expression of value in terms of a given individual's or group's interest. The value of information is closely related to its truthfulness, which becomes evident in the realization of its usefulness. One cannot understand what is happening in modern crisis-ridden society, where it is heading, or what challenges it faces, without grasping the trends in changes of values accepted by its members and the connection of those changes with the state of the economy, politics, and culture (Vashchekin et al., 2000, p. 165).

In the era of information conflicts and wars, states, political forces, oligarchic systems, individuals, and organizations often use information for manipulative and propagandistic purposes. It is no accident that political and oligarchic actors strive to control their own information resources.

Modern information technologies have not only enabled the rapid transmission, storage, and dissemination of information-making it accessible to all-but have also created the means to control public consciousness and influence people's thinking and psychology through information itself. In today's world, information has become a powerful weapon of manipulation. It provides extensive opportunities for manipulative influence on public awareness and behavior. Essentially, this concerns the deliberate transformation and distortion of public consciousness, as well as the disintegration and degradation of social behavior.

What is information policy based on manipulation today, if not a deviation from the principle of truth-telling in favor of propagandistic practices that systematically feed the public, especially television audiences, not with reliable facts but with partial, pre-constructed, or processed data-so-called pseudo-information-saturated with disinformation that exploits public trust?

Amid rising societal and internal tensions and escalating political conflict, various forces increasingly resort to different forms and techniques of informational manipulation. One of

the most widespread methods in modern information warfare is the tactic of organized information leaks, often based on illegal wiretapping. Figuratively speaking, an organized information leak is like a deliberately launched and precisely targeted informational projectile, intended to generate tension and instability within a specific social group, and to disorient ordinary citizens-preventing them from adequately understanding and assessing the reality of a given situation.

One of the common forms of manipulation is the so-called "White Propaganda." Practitioners of this technique typically follow the principle that truth belongs not to the one who speaks it, but to the one who speaks it first. Accordingly, modern manipulators seek to outpace their competitors while seemingly acknowledging sources and citing authors. Simultaneously, they deliberately omit certain portions of the information, failing to reveal who is circulating the data and for what purpose. By selectively presenting facts or only partially conveying the truth, they enable a distorted perception of reality. Intentional reduction of content volume, along with unjustified alterations or corrections, ensures the desired influence on public opinion.

Another form of manipulation-commonly referred to in both academic literature and political practice as "Gray Propaganda"-represents a more concealed version of propaganda, where either the source or topic is intentionally misrepresented or concealed, or the true purpose of the manipulation is hidden. When analyzing gray propaganda, it is important to differentiate between:

- the state of informational consciousness (as a conceptual structure shaped by disinformation, which influences informational orientation, goals, and plans), and
- the objective conditions of information dissemination, which include the overall environment of informatization in public life, as well as the security, interests, and value systems of states targeted by information attacks.

It can be cautiously stated that, in the face of today's disordered information flows, a significant portion of the public finds it increasingly difficult to distinguish clarity and coherence. Many citizens are unable to differentiate disin-

formation and outright lies from accurate and truthful information. The contemporary “apostles” of disinformation communicate only incorrect, misleading, or pre-distorted data (Petrenko & Mutina, 1978, pp. 25-30).

The core ambiguity lies in the fact that public and national consciousness often cannot determine what exactly constitutes manipulated or distorted information, whose interests it serves, and how credible or real the proposed solutions from various political and oligarchic circles truly are.

Among the various forms of public consciousness manipulation, particular attention should be paid to “Black Propaganda,” in which virtually everything is distorted: the source, the content, the true authors, and their intentions.

Truth is the fundamental value of information. Knowledge, in all eras, has been the driving force of social progress. Knowledge is information as well - but true information, the result of a complex cognitive process. Only true information allows human beings to know reality and to make correct decisions. Theoretical knowledge is verified, systematized, and valued by humanity; the same cannot be said of information as such. In the flood of information, people often become disoriented, falling victim to manipulation and propaganda.

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