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ПРИХОВУВАННЯ СУСПІЛЬНО ВАЖЛИВОЇ ІНФОРМАЦІЇ У ДОБУ ІНТЕРНЕТУ ТА СОЦІАЛЬНИХ МЕДІА

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У статті доведено, що спроби приховування, замовчування, цензурування суспільно важливої інформації в епоху нових медій призводять до зворотних результатів: росту цікавості до неї та швидкого поширення, – причому не лише серед активних шукачів істини, але й серед байдужих. Для більшого унаочнення явища, відомого як «ефект Стрейзанд», були взяті до уваги інциденти із видаленими постами у Твіттері та Фейсбукці знаних політичних діячів. Розглянуті випадки (видалені пости кандидата у президенти США Дональда Трампа, прем'єр міністра РФ Дмитрія Медведєва, міністра праці Іспанії Фатіми Баньєс, прем'єр-міністра України Володимира Гройсмана) показали, що сам факт видалення необережно опублікованого повідомлення стає інфоприводом для журналістів та предметом зацікавлення для громадськості.

У дослідженні розглянуто наслідки приховування суспільно важливої інформації у доінтернетну епоху і сьогодні. Замовчування та цензурування як стратегія не лише не виправдані з точки зору законів поширення інформації, але й, як правило, дають негативні результати. Це стосується як приховування масштабів Чорнобильської катастрофи 1986 р. у радянських ЗМІ, так і замовчування нападів на жінок у Кьольні та інших містах у новорічну ніч 2016 р. у провідних німецьких медіа. В обох випадках ЗМІ, що вдалися до приховування, зазнали дискредитації та осуду з боку громадськості, а інформація, яку вони намагалися приховати, у кінцевому підсумку не лише дійшла до суспільства, але й отримала додатковий резонанс.

Ключові слова: замовчування, цензура, Твітер, видалені твіти, напади на жінок у Кьольні, медійне висвітлення Чорнобильської катастрофи.

Political power, interest groups in all types of political systems today and in the past tend to maintain control over public opinion about fundamental things, to manipulate moods, to shape attitudes to the events and phenomena, exaggerating one side of an issue and obscuring another one, promoting beneficial sources of information and discrediting unfavorable ones. The manipulative technologies that enable media «to manufacture consent» have been successfully described long ago by researchers, such as Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky [29]. One of the important aspects of mass consciousness manipulation is the prevention of dissemination of certain information, the concealing of issues that do not fit the generally accepted worldview, that contradict dominant ideology or political

strategy. **The purpose** of this article is to find out the nature and the most common consequences of information concealment in media.

The ‘Streisand effect’

It is well known that strict censorship in the Soviet Union led to «samizdat» reproduction of censored publications, clandestine listening to foreign radio stations (*Radio Liberty*, *Voice of America*, *BBC*, *Deutsche Welle*), total public scepticism about postulates proclaimed in official press. The prohibited sources of information inspired confidence by the very fact they were prohibited. But on the large scale the Soviet citizens had limited access to alternative media, so the government (practically until the beginning of Perestroika) held monopoly on information.

This is not the case when we consider the spread of information under non-monopolistic conditions. «The Satanic Verses» – Salman Rushdie’s novel (1988) which owes its worldwide fame to the ban in most Muslim countries, to the attempts to prevent its spread in the West and to the international political conflicts around the book. This is the destiny of every Index Librorum Prohibitorum.

The same effect has been experienced by those who ordered to forget Herostratus and by those who tried to hide the private affairs of Russian official Igor Sechin [12]. Other classical examples are Martha Payne with her school lunches, the protests against London taxi company Uber, the Kulula’s advertisement [15], the attempt to hide information about the military radio base run by the French air force [45] and so on.

All these are manifestations of a phenomenon called the «Streisand effect», which consists in the following: an attempt to censure or conceal certain information fails or is even counterproductive, since the censored information ends up being widely publicized, receiving more publicity than it may otherwise have if nobody intends to silence it.

The term owes its name to an incident in 2003 with an American actress Barbra Streisand who sued photographer Kenneth Adelman and *Pictopia.com* demanding the removal of an aerial photo of her house from an advertisement that contained images of the California coastline. Barbra Streisand claimed her right to privacy. Adelman argued that he was photographing the beachfront properties to document the erosion of the California coast. As a result of her attempt of censorship Barbra Streisand provoked a tremendous media impact, more than 420,000 people saw her picture on the site within one month.

The Streisand effect is not a mystery to media experts, and therefore there have been a lot of successful attempts to use it consciously for promotional purposes. The simplest implementation of it could be the use of appealing markers with an allusion to secrecy on YouTube: «5 Videos You Are Banned From Watching», «Must Watch!! Hillary Clinton tried to ban this video», «This Video Is Illegal In 51 Countries!!», «What the mainstream media will not show you», «The hidden truth about ... finally exposed» etc. [See more : 3].

Silencing in social media

In order to make our research more accurate and clear let’s operate with obvious precedents of harbored information. The simplest example of the latter is social media posts deleted by their authors (usually famous people). It happens very often that the deleted tweets and Facebook posts receive publicity after being deleted. Namely the posts removed from social networks become the informational pretexts for journalistic articles and new posts, appealing to the readers by giving them connotation of forbidden, secret information.

It is also related to the posts deleted by social networks for breaking its rules and standards [See : 13; 31].

Removing a questionable tweet does not diminish, but increases publicity about it in the Internet, as Donald Trump learnt by his experience. His removed tweets on September 11 [26], Hillary Clinton [17], Jap Bush's wife or images of soldiers in Nazi uniform, casually used in Trump's election advertisement [38] have become famous.

Another case is Russia Prime Minister Medvedev's tweet «The Crimean bridge connects the peninsula with Russia and Crimea will finally be ours» [9], which gives reason to suspect Medvedev that he does not believe in the current indisputable belonging of Crimea to the country he is the Prime Minister of. The headlines in the media regarding this matter: «From Medvedev's Twitter the message «Crimea will finally be ours» has disappeared» (*newstes.ru*) [4]; «Medvedev removed the tweet which said «Crimea will finally become ours» (*Meduza*[8]); «Not Russian: Medvedev removed a post in Twitter on the status of Crimea» (*bigmir.net* [11]); «Medvedev hinted that Crimea is not part of Russia» (*RBC Ukraine* [10]); «Medvedev blurted out that the Crimea is not part of Russia» (*pl.com.ua* [6]); «It will be ours. Medvedev removed the tweet on the status of Crimea» (*Korrespondent.net* [7]). It is not difficult to notice that the informational pretext, which encourages journalists to write about these tweets, is the fact of message deleting itself rather than its scandalous content.

Spanish Minister of Labour Fátima Báñez's Twitter published an automatic message: «I got 5390 points in Bubble Shooter Adventures! Can you do better?», which slightly revealed the sort of activity the official devoted her time to. The tweet has been removed, but the publicity around it is not diminished. Here are some headlines from the Spanish press: «A tweet of the Minister Báñez starts the controversy in the networks» (*El Pais* [44]); «Fátima Báñez caught on Twitter because of the video game Bubble Shooter» (*Qué!* [20]); «Fátima Báñez named «childish mischief» what happened on Twitter with the Bubble Shooter» (*ABC* [21]); «Fátima Báñez, caught on Twitter playing with bubbles» (*La Informacion* [24]); «Fátima Báñez, 'caught' on Twitter playing with exploding bubbles in the Bubble Shooter» (*Huffington Post* [23]); «Fátima Báñez, on Twitter: «I got 5390 points in Bubble Shooter Adventures!» (*20 minutos* [22]).

Let's see a precedent from Facebook. Ukraine's Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman has deleted his Facebook post in which he praised the successes of Irpin city. The motive for removing the post was the opening of a criminal case against the mayor of the city for the theft of land. However, journalist Orest Sohar published a copy of this post. Eventually the removed message has been replicated by the Ukrainian media. Let's have a look at the headlines: «Why Groysman deleted his post about Irpin?» (*Pravda Irpenia* [14]); «Groysman quickly removed the post on Facebook, where he praises the controversial mayor of Irpin» (*ukranews.com* [1]); «Groysman deleted the praise in address of the Irpin authorities from his facebook page» (*Tsenzor.net* [2]).

The examples can go on. Ratings of the most unsuccessful, then deleted tweets by politicians and public figures have been published by *CNN* [35], *Daily Dot* [37], *Policy.Mic* [25], *Latin Post* [34], *El Mundo* [36]. There are enough reasons to consider deleted tweets and post as a part of media reality, which deserves scientific investigations.

Special resources like *Postghost.com* or *Politwoops.eu* (there are dozens of such sites) play role of «cemeteries» for tweets deleted by public figures. Twitter by turns fights against such projects and allows their existence depending on the ongoing discussion regarding the

«right to be forgotten» and the principle according to which «what politicians say in public should be available to anyone». On the one hand, «deleting a tweet is an expression of the user's voice», but on the other hand there is «an obvious and compelling public interest in maintaining access to a politician's statement about a public issue» [See : 16; 30; 32; 42].

A famous Italian journalist, columnist of *La Stampa* Gianluca Nicoletti in connection with the Post Ghost service talks about the «great wall of shame, where all the removed tweets will be available». In his opinion, «*Postghost* should be the great leveler, a principle of social justice, the great cultural revolution in social media. It does so, that the people who are known and tweet from a throne, from an elevated position in regards to the rest of the world, must pay much more attention (compared to the ordinary mortal) to what they say and write» [40].

There is one more observation on this subject. Brazilian President Michel Temer has not deleted his tweets of the 2014-2015 biennium. At this time he opposed the impeachment of former president Dilma Ruseff, which is not consistent with his current views. The Brazilian newspapers reminded him about it: «Temer's post against impeachment published in 2015» (*Revista Forum* [43]); «From 'unthinkable' to 'natural': How Temer's opinion on impeachment changed» (*Huffpost Brazil* [18]); «Michel Temer, on impeachment: «it is unthinkable» (*Veja* [39]); «What Temer has already said about impeachment» (*Brasil247* [41]); «A year ago Temer wrote: «Impeachment has no legal basis» (*Vermelho* [28]); «A year ago Michel Temer believed that «impeachment was unthinkable» (*Diario de Pernambuco* [27]).

As can be seen from above analyzed precedent, the resonance in the media did take place, although Temer did not remove his defamatory tweets. Therefore it would be a wrong conclusion to say that only deleted tweets lead to media resonance. The only significant difference is that in reports on Temer there was no such reproach against him that he denied his words.

Consequences of information concealment

In order to research the consequences of information concealment let us examine two cases. The first one is from the pre-Internet epoch, the second one is of recent time.

A significant precedent of information concealment is the Chernobyl disaster case and media coverage of it. The explosion at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in April 1986 triggered the release of substantial amounts of radioactivity into the atmosphere. The catastrophe caused health disorders, cancer and other diseases. It was extremely dangerous to stay outside few days after the explosion, but the Soviet government decided to keep it secret and to hold the parade on the 1st of May in Kyiv with ten thousands of children participants. While in the Western World the news about the tragedy was on the front pages, the leading Soviet newspaper *Pravda* gave a little announcement that there was a fire at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, but it was already localized and everything was under control. Another paper *The Soviet Ukraine* reprinted that message. That was all the information the Ukrainian and Soviet people disposed at that time. The strategy adopted by Soviet media led to unnecessary casualties among the population, which knew nothing about the danger. All of this together brought discredit on the Soviet Union. Olesya Isayuk even believes that «1986 was the beginning of the end for the Soviet Union» [5].

During the 2015/2016 New Year's Eve celebrations, hundreds of sexual assaults (including groping), at least five rapes, and numerous thefts were reported in Germany, mainly in Cologne city centre. Similar incidents happened in Hamburg, Frankfurt, Dortmund,

Düsseldorf, Stuttgart, Zürich, Wien, Helsinki and other European cities. Could that be coincidence? A lot of researchers and journalists think it was planned in advance [19]. Those incidents were a phenomenon known in the Arab World as *taharrush gamea* in Arabic. Translated as «group sexual harassment in crowds».

While in social networks and in local newspapers people expressed their outrage and explained the circumstances of the accident, the vast majority of nationwide media just were trying to silence the situation not reporting about it.

On the 3rd of January to the spreading of news about the events in Cologne joined some popular papers such as *Der Bild* or *Die Welt*. All their reports were extremely limited. They avoided the ethnic component of the events, although this circumstance was already clarified in social networks, and in some of the non-mainstream media. All the other major German papers and TV-channels were completely silent about it.

Tagesschau, a German national and international television news service produced by the redaction of *ARD* (the leading German television network) explained its four days silence about the events in Cologne in a very hypocritical way saying it was because the police didn't communicate about the events. Stefan Winterbauer fairly ridiculed this excuse of Tagesschau: «After all, the *WDR*, the largest broadcaster of the *ARD*, is the second largest broadcasting corporation in Europe after the *BBC*» [46].

The excuse of other leading German channel *ZDF* was also ridiculous. The editor-in-chief Elmar Theveßen explained the absence (the «postponement») of the Cologne news in *heute-Nachrichten* on the 4th of January (when all German media have already informed about it) by the need «to win time for additional interviews» [33] and so on.

The public indignation in Germany provoked a large-scale resonance in social media. So the politicians, the police and the mainstream media, which were trying to disguise the problem instead of discussing it and reacting to it, eventually have been forced to pay the consequences and to bear responsibility for the attempt to hide the socially important information.

Conclusions

The foregoing analysis prompts the conclusion that in the Internet age one can not systematically hide socially significant information from the public that seeks to know it. Trying to hide a tweet or a Facebook post that discredits him, a politician actually reaches the opposite result. The most ironic thing about it is that the supposedly hidden information disseminates not only among active seekers of truth, but also among the indifferent.

All this more than proves Federico Fellini's phrase: «Censorship is advertising paid by the government». In terms of Internet reality the attempts to conceal information lead to its revealing, and the more desperate those attempts are, the greater revealing this information receives. As a result, on the Internet the most popular books, films, videos, even advertising are prohibited ones.

An attempt to hide an important information usually has very bad consequences for both the society and the media, which are responsible for the doomed to failure concealment. The truth inevitably reveals itself and the media rest with harmed reputation.

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CONCEALMENT OF SOCIALLY IMPORTANT INFORMATION IN THE TIMES OF INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA

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The article proves that any attempts of concealment, suppression or censorship of socially important information in the age of new media inevitably lead to opposite results, namely to the growth of interest and quick dissemination of this information, not only among active seekers of truth, but also among the indifferent. For a better illustration of the phenomenon known as the «Streisand effect», it is taken into account the incidents of politicians' deleted posts on social media.

The research examines the effects of the socially significant information concealment in pre-Internet era and nowadays. Concealment as a strategy is not only unjustified in terms of information flow patterns, but also tends to give negative results for both the society and the media.

Key words: silencing, information concealment, censorship, Tweeter, deleted tweets, New Year's Eve assaults in Germany, Chernobyl disaster media coverage.