

MEDIA BEHAVIOR OF AN INDIVIDUAL AS OBJECT OF MEDIA PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH

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Abstract

In this article, media behavior is defined as a form of social behavior of an individual in different media contexts – media perception, media consumption, media production. At the same time, we consider media consumption as a part of general media behavior of an individual, as a manifestation of activeness, selectivity, directedness and consciousness of behavior in media space. The article gives results of 2 researches. The 1st one is aimed at studying interconnection of media behavior's features and youth's social concepts about mass media. The 2nd one is about analyzing the interconnection of preferred copying- strategies and media behavior's features. The results' analysis has enabled to single out types of attitude towards mass media, prevailing reasons of addressing mass media, and types of media consumers. The results have also revealed that media environment is used by the respondents not only as an informational, cognitive, communicative resource but as a psychological resource to cope with difficult life situations.

Key words: media behavior, mass media, media psychology, media consumption, social concepts, coping-strategies.

Introduction

One of the most significant and large-scale tasks of media psychology is the study of media behavior of an individual and in particular the study of media consumption, peculiarities of perception and assessment of media products, creation of media products, as well as investigation of personal and group media effects, peculiarities of media culture impact on cognitive, emotional, value spheres of

personality, the analysis of social behavior patterns in media environment, socio-psychological peculiarities of media preferences etc. Media-consumption and person's media-behaviour have been a subject of research for many domestic and foreign researchers. They study social and psychological problems of mass media functioning and its impact on the audience, the analysis of personality and mass media interaction. It is necessary to emphasize that while analyzing the same phenomenon (or at least various aspects of the same problem) of social behavior of an individual in media world, different researchers use various terms: "media behavior", "informational behavior", "communicative and consumer behavior in mass media context".

The diversity of social behavior motivation and multiplicity of media functions make the issue of differentiation of individual media behavior in media world topical; social ideas of a person about mass media, the choice of copying strategies, and psychological culture of a personality may become differentiating criteria.

Theoretic and Methodological Foundation of Research

The problems of personality media culture shaping from the point of view of the content are connected with media behavior of an individual by all researchers. Even when the concrete kinds of media consumption are studied, it is actually talked about the peculiarities of personality media behavior, since media consumption is one of the indicators and at the same time one of the forms of media behavior. In our opinion, the notion "media behavior" is much wider than the notion "media consumption"; moreover, media consumption is a part, indicator and manifestation of the culture of personality media behavior.

According to our research data [1], media behavior of the individuals may vary by the following indices: Content orientation of the interests of an individual as a media user, which is displayed in the form of appealing to various types of information sources; Conscious idea about the motives of appealing to virtual world; Awareness and adequate evaluation of the consequences of interaction with this or

that kind of media and the character of their impact on his/her own personality; The lack of the habit of passive visits of various sites (Internet-vagrancy) and thoughtless absorption of information.

State of the Issue

It is necessary to note that in the modern study, they emphasize mostly negative impact on emotional, behavioural, and cognitive aspects of personality. Far less publications depict mass media's positive impact: the rise of information awareness; the broadening of circle of interests, cognitive needs; professional activity growth; the raise of interest in political issues; mobilization and unification of people in the course of various campaigns; social contacts support; realization of self-image; freedom of self-expression in the Internet space; prompt psychological assistance (online consultations of psychologists, correction of fears and depression, mood improvement); prophylaxis of bad habits (social advertizing, programs on the harm of smoking and alcohol abuse); the formation and promotion of healthy life (programs about nourishment, sports).

Purpose and Objectives of Research

This research is about one of the most critical parts of the common mechanism of physiological control of media-behaviour – the social concepts of an individual. The main objective here is to study the role, place, and functions of social concepts of mass media in organizing the media-behaviour as a specific type of a person's social behaviour.

It is necessary to emphasize that *the study of psychological peculiarities of social ideas about mass media* is a new field of media psychological analysis; in interdisciplinary research mass media are considered mainly as a factor of formation of social notions about this or that social phenomenon. Thus, mass media are viewed as a factor of formation the notions of the world; the country; professions; femininity and masculinity; ideal appearance; healthy life; the ways to cope with complex life

situations; significant social problems of the society etc., while mass media themselves can act as an object of social notions.

Hypothesis of the Study as Summary of Current Theoretical Approaches

Following S. Moskovici's [3], we think the function of a perception tool, the adaptive function and the function of behaviour regulation to be the functions of social notions. And the social notion is not simply a copy of the world around – it is a product and process of active socio-psychological reproduction of reality; social notions have macro-social, public character, therefore, not the fragmentary attitudes of a single individual, but his opinions, attitudes and assessments as a member of a social group should become the object of research. Basing on these ideas, it is possible to assert that social notions of a single individual about mass media implement the three functions stated above, i.e. cognition, adaptation and regulation and thus become an important factor to determine and regulate the peculiarities of individual's media behavior. It's worth noting that the psychological context of personal notions of an individual about mass media as a social phenomenon is investigated quite poorly and interrelation of the above specified notions with the organization of social behavior in media environment is not revealed.

As the main hypothesis of the research, we may say that the study of an individual's personal notions of mass media can show new approaches to the study of socialization processes of growing generations, formation of social identity of the youth and reveal psychological regularities of media behavior of developing personality in modern media world. Mass media themselves act not only as a factor of the formation of social notions about the reality and social conscience control, but as an object of social notions, i.e. in public conscience there are definite ideas about mass media as a social institution, its role, mission, effects and functions.

Results of Empiric Study

Further, the results of two empiric studies which were held in the 2009–2015 are presented. The object of the study is sampling the students of the Saratov State University, numbered 260 (N=260) aged 17-22.

1st Empiric Study

The first research was aimed at the study of interrelation between the peculiarities of media behavior (first of all, media consumption, appeal to media) and social notions of the youth about mass media. In the course of research we put the task to reveal media preferences and youth attitude to mass media as well as disclose the motives of the youth access to mass media, since the motives and attitudes are sign indicators of any kind of behavior.

In our research the following methods and procedures were used: at the preliminary stage of the study – the analysis of the Internet discussions from the point of view of discussion participants attitude to different kinds of media; at the first stage, directed at the study of media behavior peculiarities the following materials were used: the form on the study of media preferences of the audience (characteristics of media consumption, individual ideas about different kinds of mass media, preferences in consumption of definite sources and types of information, the presence of behavior stereotypes in the sphere of media consumption etc.), the questionnaire “Individual style of media consumption” (Yu. N. Dolgov, G. N. Malyuchenko et al.), the procedure “Motivational structure of information activity” (Y. N. Dolgov et al.). At the second stage focused on the study of social notions of the youth about mass media the following methods were used: the method of a conversation and the method of free descriptions, as well as designed by us author’s questionnaire consisting of four blocks: the first one is oriented on the analysis of mass media expectations, the second one evaluates the degree of confidence in different media, the third one is focused on revealing attitudes to various mass media,

the fourth block is directed on revealing ideas about mass media and measures of their realization in reality.

Main Results of 1st Empiric Study

The first stage of the study showed the positions of the Internet and television in media preferences of the youth. They take the leading positions in media preferences; moreover, it is just the Internet and television that the respondents associate up-to-date mass media with. In significance the Internet excels any other sources of information, even personal, while the relative importance of other media goes down. It should be noticed that the opinion about the Internet as a source of information as a whole is more positive while television does not deserve such trust.

The analysis of the next stage results made it possible to designate the following dominating kinds of motivation for the respondents to appeal to the media: communicative, cognitive, relaxational, informational, compensatory and identifying. In the context of the study of respondents motivation to appeal to media all motives split up into two categories: active – applying to media with a definite purpose, being conscious about the motives of apply, and passive – applying to the media due to inertia, habitually, “media vagrancy”, just to kill the time.

The resulting data allow sorting out 2 types of respondents’ activity:

socially oriented activity (communicative, motivation of cooperation, interaction, assistance, affiliation and partly professional-businesslike motivation);

person-oriented activity, i.e. activity, directed at self and solving personal problems (compensatory, entertaining, recreational, cognitive, identifying and motivation of self-realization and self-presentation).

Additional analysis of the materials on the study of the motives of applying to mass media let single out the types of media consumers in accordance with their dominating motivational orientation.

- 1) Emotion-centered media consumer (46 %) – this group comprises the respondents with dominating entertaining, compensatory, relaxational

(recreational), reactivating or emotionally-stimulating motivation, i.e. this type is characterized by the fact, that media and their products are considered as a source of emotional experience, compensation of the lack of feelings in real life; means of entertainment and enjoyment (hedonistic orientation), relaxation, switch and distraction from own problems and concerns; as a way of self-regulation and getting emotional pathos, necessary arousal and vivacity, stimulation to activity. It can be said that this group consider media as: a) a possibility to escape from reality; b) a means of entertainment, c) compensation of the lack of emotional experiences, d) activation of emotional-volitional states (as an energetic drink).

- 2) Communication-centered media consumer (30%) – this type is represented by motivation of communication, self-realization and self-presentation; it is professionally-businesslike, informational and is characterized by considering media information and media products as a means and environment for communication between both individuals and groups, meeting new interesting people; the type given prefers direct interpersonal contacts and virtual communication as well. Aspiration to help other users and find a reference group with similar interests and values on the Net is vividly expressed in this type in the Internet space.
- 3) Information-centered media consumer (14%) – informational, cognitive, professionally-businesslike motivation is characteristic for this type. This type fixes the attitude to media first of all as to the source of useful information, important data and getting knowledge not only for information awareness, general outlook, but for the personal and professional growth. For this type the important criteria of media messages are novelty, practical value, usefulness, possibility of broadening the horizon.
- 4) Sense-orientation-centered media consumer (10%) – this one becomes apparent in domination of cognition, identification, self-realization motivation, as well as in an individual orientation at the internal work implementation, at

self-organization, strengthening of stand in life, strong aspiration to personal spiritual growth. Media as the function of cognition (a reason for speculation) not only of the world around, but the cognition of self prevails in this type. It can be said that for sense-orientation-centered media consumer the media are the agents of creation and maintenance of his picture of the world, confirmation and widening of his views, judgments in relation to the surrounding reality, including his own life. For this type media play orientation-problematic role, help answer important ideological questions; media stories and media messages are important as an example, as a definite pattern. Media environment is interpreted by this group not only as identification but as resource environment to confirm the correctness of the chosen stand in life. Motivation of information search for the type given is implemented selectively in conformity with the internal aspirations, in compliance with the ideas of personal necessity.

The study of notions about the mass media functions showed that in respondents opinion one of the priority functions of mass media is informing people about the events in the country and in the world; according to our data, information function belongs to the leading, important and most significant ones. Practical assistance to the population in solving the important life problems is the next in significance, the third position in the function rating keeps relaxation function.

To specify the data, we conducted an extra empiric research to study the content of the student audience's notions about mass media was the technique of free descriptions. We asked the respondents to write 5-7 adjectives for each notion representing contemporary media environment: "the Internet" and "television" which characterize them most precisely and fully. Having counted the frequency of mentioning the adjectives used by the respondents for each notion, we got the list of most frequently used descriptive adjectives which were ranked further. As a result, 73 nonrecurring adjectives were obtained for the notion "television" and 94 adjectives – for the notion "the Internet".

The outcome was that in our respondents' notions, the Internet is, first of all, a gigantic storage of information, up-to-date means of communication, "marching in step with time", oriented at the future, brave, free. The Internet gains such characteristics as modern, social, informational; global; educational; rapid; accessible; fascinating. Television, in its turn, is characterized as informational, manipulating, entertaining, accessible, monotonous, traditional, advertizing, annoying. Thus, on the basis of the characteristics given, the respondents give more positive characteristics to the internet rather than television.

The analysis of the materials gained allowed to denote the following *types of attitude* to mass media: negative, differentiated, ambivalent (contradictory), positive.

The first type of relation to mass media is characterized by the negative perception of the media (10%), their products and media communications, the Net in particular; they prefer real communication to indirect, virtual and believe that internet communication has lots of minuses: low intellectual level of interlocutors, much non-standard vocabulary, big possibilities for deceit, the lack of the visual contact, limited range of non-verbal means of communication, complexity in feelings and emotions expression. Moreover, in this group conception mass media deprives a person of the ability to think independently, just providing the ready standard schemes, world pictures which should be oriented at. At the same time, the respondents of the given type of attitude to media use the Internet in search of information needed, they have their e-mail address, ICQ address, they sometimes watch television, listen to the radio.

Some representatives of the negative type are registered in one, more rarely in two kinds of social networks, but do not spend much time visiting the Net, keeping in touch has an irregular character and is connected either with certain life events or holidays. However, the majority of respondents of this type are not registered in the Net at present, but they had this experience. The decision to leave social network was made due to the limited time possibilities. As a whole, global openness of the Internet makes this type of respondents anxious. In their opinion, they understand and are

aware of manipulative, advertising character of contemporary media, that television and the Internet products have damaging, destructive character but they use these media for utilitarian, functional purposes (search of information, communication with friends from other cities, for entertainment and distraction from their own problems or just to learn what is going on in the world, “to be in course of events”). For negative type of attitude informational, professionally-businesslike, cognitive, communicative motivation is inherent.

The second type of attitude is characterized by *differentiated attitude to media* (35%). This type is connected with motivation of different kinds. In the notions of respondents of this type media have both negative and positive role, and the representatives of differentiated type emphasized that media are essential today, they have more positive than negative features and as a whole everything depends on a person, on his/her abilities to choose useful programs, sites which will contribute to his development. Besides, the given type of respondents' attitude is characterized by differentiated attitude and assessment of participants and creators of media products, media producers. The respondents exemplified various television channels, different professional level of journalists, presenters, good and harm, pluses and minuses of definite internet-sites.

The third, *ambivalent or contradictory type of attitude to the media* (40%) is characteristic for people with media-active type of behavior; compensatory, entertaining, communicative (communication as a pleasure) motivation dominates. Along with enthusiastic, positive, emotional assessments critical opinion about up-to-date media which is expressed in negative assessments of a huge amount of commercials in media, the presence of pay sites, importunate strangers imposing communication is inherent for this type. The notions of this group of respondents about the media are developed in accordance with functional tasks laid to the media; contradictoriness in the attitude to the media and their role in the society are characteristic to these notions.

The fourth type of attitude may be denoted as *positive (15%)*; this type reflects the ideas of respondents about the necessity of mass media in society functioning as an important socio-regulating institution. This notion was reflected in the following comments: “Television, the Internet are associated primarily with entertainment, rest, all kinds of serials and the sequence of talk-shows, something secondary and vulgar, but meanwhile these are mass media that inform about the news, the events in other countries, reports about the important festivals, different actions, activate political activity of the population”. Positive type of attitude is connected with the domination of communicative, recreational and informational motivation. The type given corresponds to the media-active and balanced, more rarely to media-dependent types of behavior. In media assessments positive evaluation of mass media role in the life of society and the private one mainly prevail. The respondents of this group are registered in several social networks, have big experience of virtual interaction, participate in forums discussions, love leaving comments, actively use all the novelties of information technologies; at the same time they love watching television which is considered a way of getting information and comparing the volume of information in television news with the Internet sources, the Internet media. Television is also considered as a necessary and fast way of taking off the weariness and for entertainment.

Thus, the results of the research done let reveal the connection of the peculiarities of media consumption types and dominating motives of appealing to mass media with personality’s social ideas about the mass media world.

2nd Empiric Study

The purpose and objective of the second research was: *the study of the interconnection between the preferred coping-strategies and the peculiarities of personality media behavior: the study of the media as a coping resource, the tool of control* (in this connection social ideas of the students about media functions, represented coping-strategies as well as respondents relation to the translated control

patterns, their assessment are analyzed); the study of applying to the media as a coping strategy, i.e. the study of the factors influencing personality's choice of the media as a coping.

The methods: to achieve the goal set the following materials were used: the designed questionnaire consisting of 35 open questions aimed at identifying the attitude to the media; test on the Internet addiction (K. Yang); “Coping-Mechanisms” technique (test by E. Haim); the personality questionnaire MSIA “Motivation Structure of Information Activity” (G.N. Malyuchenko et al.); the questionnaire “Individual style of Media Consumption” (G.N. Malyuchenko, A.S. Kopovoy). The motives and goals of applying to different kinds of media, media preferences, content orientation, diversity, width of interests; sense dispositions in relation to media products; the Internet- or tele-vagrancy habits etc. were studied.

The analysis of the data obtained showed that media behavior is a habitual form of social behavior and media environment is used by the respondents not only as an informational, cognitive, communicative resource, but as psychological resource to cope with the difficult life situations. Besides, escape from reality into virtual world is a kind of self-assistance for taking off the nervous and psychic tension and overcoming various emotional difficulties, for self-regulation and distraction from personal problems.

Basic Results of 2nd Empiric Study

Basing on the results of the empiric research, we were able to identify five types of respondents: media addicted, media non-addicted – according to the presence of media addiction (net addiction, computer addiction, television addiction); active, passive and balanced – according to the type of media activity in behavior. The data of investigations make it possible to assert that appealing to the media is the most preferable way of coping and the means of problem solving for the media active respondents and at the same time it is the means of the problem solving drift for the media addicted individuals. The most preferable coping strategies in the group of

media addicted respondents are non-adaptive variants of coping strategies oriented at emotions and behavior (active avoidance, disregard, aggression), and the higher the parameters of non-adaptive variants of coping behavior, the higher the indices of Internet-addiction and television addiction. Individuals with the balanced type of media activity more often use coping oriented at problem solving and the sphere of solving the problems may be both in the real world and in the virtual reality, depending on the situation context.

The connection found between media addiction and preferable coping strategies, to our mind, is the basis of the formation of the types of controlling behavior of individuals: adaptive, relatively adapting and non-adaptive. The adaptive type of respondents is characterized by the high level of media behavior self-regulation, the lack of media addiction; the non-adaptive type does not possess problem analysis, self-control retention, optimism, these respondents have a high level of active avoidance, disregard and aggression.

The analysis of the data obtained let us conclude:

1. Media behavior is the habitual form of social behavior and generally media environment is used by the respondents not only as an informational, cognitive, communicative resource but as a psychological resource to cope with difficult life situations.
2. As a result of empiric investigation, various types of respondents behavior were singled out: by the degree of activity– media active, passive and balanced; by the force of addiction – media addicted, media non-addicted; and by the specificity of media addiction – network addiction, computer addiction, television addiction.
3. The survey data let us assert that the access to media environment is the most preferable way of coping and the means of solving the problem for media active respondents and at the same time it is the way of drift form problem solving for media-addicted individuals. The most preferable coping strategies

in media-addicted group are non-adaptive variants of coping strategies oriented at emotions and behavior (active avoidance, disregard, aggression), and the higher the parameters of non-adaptive variants of coping behavior, the higher the indicators of the Internet- or television addiction. Individuals with the balanced type of media activity more often use coping oriented at problem solving, and the sphere of these problems solving is both in real and virtual world depending on the situation context.

The revealed connection between media addiction and preferable coping strategies, in our opinion, is the basis of the formation of individual's coping behavior types: adaptive, relatively adaptive and non-adaptive. The adaptive type of respondents is characterized by the high level of media behavior self-regulation and the lack of media addiction; the non-adaptive type lacks problem analysis, self-control, optimism, they have the high level of active avoidance, disregard and aggression.

General Conclusions

Generally speaking, the above-mentioned results testify to our hypotheses: the study suggests that mass media's impact on the processes of personality formation and development as well as media environment development under the influence of a personality are becoming the most important problems of contemporary media psychology including the issues of a comparative study of how a particular individual can influence media processes, on the one hand, and how the peculiarities and organization of up-to-date media space (the study of personality behavior diversity in changing media environments) influence different people, on the other.

So, we can argue that further development of media psychology will be connected not only with the steadily growing influence of mass media tools and systems on an individual and the society as a whole, but also with a practical need to work out recommendations for developing a person's media culture, forming his or

her personal competence (cultural and psychological) and media literacy, and creating and strengthening a person's media immunity.

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