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DIDACTIC POTENTIAL OF PR MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS

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ДИДАКТИЧЕСКИЙ ПОТЕНЦИАЛ PR-МЕДИАПРЕЗЕНТАЦИЙ

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Annotation. PR media representations and television have undeniably contributed to important changes in people's lives through the advancement of technology. The aim of this work is to analyze the didactic potential of PR media representations, as well as the analysis of the didactic potential of television series on various health topics for students of psychology and medicine. Considering that this is a review article in which various previous researches will be presented, the basic method will be content analysis. We will present objectivist and constructionist theories of knowledge and the processes underlying their internalization, but also give examples of good media practice and the high didactic potential of various media representations of health phenomena.

Keywords: PR representations, didactic potential, health phenomena, TV series

Аннотация. PR-представления в СМИ и на телевидении, несомненно, способствовали важным изменениям в жизни людей благодаря развитию технологий. Целью данной работы является анализ дидактического потенциала PR-медиапредставлений, а также анализ дидактического потенциала телесериалов на различные медицинские темы для студентов факультетов психологии и медицины. Поскольку это обзорная статья, основным методом будет контент-анализ. Мы представим объективистские и конструкционистские теории познания и процессы, лежащие в основе их интернализации, а также приведем примеры хорошей медиапрактики и высокого дидактического потенциала различных медийных репрезентаций феноменов здоровья.

Ключевые слова: PR-представления, дидактический потенциал, феномен здоровья, телесериал

Introduction. Television is undisputed, as a technology to suppress leisure, as the most popular pastime in history' (Hartley, 2003: 19–22) and product of modern industrial society' (Fiske, Hartley, 2003: 25), brought important changes in people's lives. It influences the spread of globalization, enabling the crossing of socio-cultural boundaries whose non-local meanings are interpreted in the local context

(Abu-Lughod, 2008: 45). That is, if we interpret the concept of globalization within the framework of PR and television studies, we can connect television globalization with the development of technology, but also with global changes in institutions, culture and economy (Đurić, 2015: 50). The aim of this work is to analyze the didactic potential of PR media representations, as well as the analysis of the didactic potential of television series on

various health topics for students of psychology and medicine. Considering that this is a review article in which various previous researches will be presented, the basic method will be content analysis.

Main part. The format analyzed in this work of PR media representation and feature television series, in addition to globalization, also brings with it the representation of different cultures and societies, so the analysis of these media formats enables anthropological research of society at the same time (Coman, 2005). In addition to the depiction of different cultures and societies, another specificity of watching a television series, according to Raymond Williams, is that we cannot view this action as an isolated sequence (Williams, 1973/2003: 93). Namely, spending time in front of the “small screen”, the television viewer is exposed to a sequence of series, advertising content, PR and own announcements of the program schemes of the watched channel, and this sequence is continuously repeated. In this way, the action of watching a television series represents a flowing activity, which is directed at different contents that must be viewed as a whole (Williams, 1973/2003: 91). In this context, when it comes to media representations of health conditions within television series, we can conclude that the audience is exposed to these representations, on the one hand, within the series being watched, and often during commercial breaks. Therefore, the audience is exposed not only to the narrative of the watched television series and its representations, but often also to the media agendas of pharmaceutical companies, which in their own way also represent various health problems and ways of reducing them through their products. Thus, the audience's attention is directed to different contents during a limited period of time, which they devote to watching a television series, and which may concern the same object of representation from different positions, and presented in different frames. Research conducted more than 40 years ago talks about the potential impact of presented television content on the health behavior of the audience. Namely, Anthony Meyer and his collaborators conducted pioneering research whose goal was to determine the effectiveness of various preventive activities on risk factors for the occurrence and

development of cardiovascular diseases (Meyer, 1980: 129–142). In three Californian cities, a total of 500 people were identified who were found to have an increased risk of developing diseases from the group of cardiac disorders. They divided the respondents into three groups, according to the cities in which they lived, and then divided each group into three more subgroups that differed according to the applied preventive activities. The first subgroup was specifically exposed to media messages in which various risk factors for the occurrence of cardiac problems were explained to them, as well as ways to correct them. In addition to media messages, the second subgroup was sent to individual counseling, where they were given additional instructions for eliminating risk factors. The third subgroup, on the other hand, did not receive any information regarding risk factors for the occurrence of cardiac problems. The results showed a higher degree of interest and education in relation to risk factors and risky behaviors related to cardiovascular diseases in the first two subgroups. In the third, control subgroup, no change was noted. As expected, respondents who were exposed to the combined treatment of individual approach and media messages recorded the highest degree of improvement, but on the other hand, their percentages of elimination of risk factors were not significantly higher compared to the group of respondents exposed only to media messages. The above data indicate the complexity of human behavior and the limited influence of media influence alone, without considering other socioeconomic and cultural variables of the observed population.

On the other hand, thanks to streaming media, television series have entered the “post-television era” (Kovačević, 2013: 98), which resulted in the massing of the audience, but also in the omission of advertising content. Due to the mass of the audience addressed, as well as the type of messages they transmit, the observed media format affects the creation of an image of the reality of a part of public opinion. However, PR and feature television series do not only influence the construction of “reality” but also the formation of emotions, beliefs, opinions, attitudes, habits, and even the entire value systems of the audience. The mentioned media format, thanks to its specific combination of

language, image, color and sound, can impressively portray the most diverse physical, physiological and psychological states of an individual. It is the combination of image effects, music and dialogue in television representation that shapes the thoughts, feelings and attitudes of the audience.

Feature television series are now widespread, present on various technical devices and easily accessible. Representations presented within this media format depict events in the public and private spheres, as well as individual health phenomena, through visual and additive signs. The above-mentioned representations are fiction, but also a product of a culture of a commercial nature, the amount of production of which depends on the interest of the recipients, but also on political, corporate, social and other interest agendas. However, if the representations of a certain phenomenon always contain the same elements, such representations can influence the formation and promotion of stereotypes. Through continuous repetition, the audience accepts stereotyping as relevant, precisely because through constant repetition, the representations become dominant in the individual's subconscious.

It follows from the above that the analysis of media representations of health phenomena in PR and feature television series is impossible to carry out without understanding the anthropology, psychology and theories of representation of the observed media format. According to McLuhan's understanding, each medium engages viewers in a different way, by forming a symbolic connection between the message and the medium that transmits that message, because the choice of media format determines the transformation of the message itself. This transformation affects the way the audience will understand the message (McLuhan, 2005: 155). The stated thesis is not much different from the thesis of Williams, according to which the media mediates, transmits and transforms the content of the message during its transmission (Williams, 1983: 203). From the above perspectives, media includes the area of symbolic and cultural space, but certainly also technical-technological, in the sense of the choice of media that transmits a given message, and which in the context of this paper certainly represents a technical tool, i. e. a platform on which certain

content is broadcast in the form of PR or television series.

Similarly, Kenneth Bruffee describes knowledge by stating that it is: the kind of matter contained in the "vessel" that simultaneously gives it form, and which we call the mind. The professor's "bowl" is full, or almost full. The student, on the other hand, does not have a full bowl. The purpose of learning is to "transfer" knowledge from a fuller vessel to a less full one Bruffee, 1999: 151.

The expressed opinion belongs to the objectivist theory of knowledge according to which knowledge is only transferred from one "vessel" to another. However, this theory ignores the possibility that a different "vessel", in this case the mind of an individual, transforms knowledge, similar to the transformation of a message through the choice of media, and transmits it as transformed to students, that is, to the audience. On the other side are theories of constructivist epistemology, which start from the premise that knowledge is constructed during the process of interaction of the individual's mind with various elements of its environment (Bruffee, 1999: 151). More precisely, according to this theory, students should be encouraged to learn through communication, observation, but also exposure to information in different formats, in order to incorporate other people's experience into their own opinion. The most important theoreticians of constructivist learning theory are Jean Piaget — creator of constructivist constructivism and Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky — creator of social constructivism. Vygotsky believes that no individual goes through the same process of cognitive development, even when they are in the same socio-cultural environment, because their social activities differ from the social activities of another individual in the same context.

It is these social activities, primarily through the development and use of language, that change, determine and improve the cognitive-developmental capacities and processes of the individual (Vigotsky, 1962). The internalization of dialogic forms as a form of external experiences opens the way to an additional, deeper understanding of information, and this is precisely what forms of external experience, among others, offer drama television series. In

the aforementioned context, the improvement of cognitive-developmental capacities and processes of psychology and medicine students differ in their individual social activities. Under social activities, in the context of this paper, we can consider the exposure and interest of each individual student, whether psychology or medicine, to watch various television series that represent their external experience. By internalizing the presented representations, each of the students will gain an additional understanding of the phenomenon that is represented in the observed television series or presented in a PR context. The difference is made by the choices of television series, i. e. their basic themes on the one hand, as well as the choice of PR content, and on the other, the individual socio-cultural environment of each individual student.

The mentioned epistemological theories in no way exclude the use or importance of audio-visual media in the learning process, that is, they do not diminish their influence on the cognitive, affective and overall psychological development of the personality. It is audio-visual representations such as feature television series and PR that give access to new and different knowledge, social arrangements or cultural structures (Sarceda Gorgoso. & Raposo Rivas, 2009: 39). The internalization of such representations, in which auditory and visual elements gain meaning in mutual interaction, leads to learning, i. e. adopting someone else's experience as one's own opinion. One of the researches on this topic showed that 11% of the represented information is adopted by using the sense of hearing, while 83% of the represented information is adopted by the sense of sight (Ferrés, 1992: 38–39). That is, when it comes to learning, according to the same research, students acquire only 10% by reading, 20% remember what they hear, 30% what they see, and 50% remember information that is represented in an audio-visual format — by simultaneously engaging the sense of hearing. and vision. Additionally, if the students later discuss the represented content, the percentage of adopted content reaches 79%, and if the represented content is also applied, the adopted percentage rises to even 90%.

Therefore, written communication requires abstraction from students, while audio-visual representations are concrete, i. e. through image

and sound they contribute to the contextualization of the meaning of the observed material (Canning-Wilson & Wallace, 2000). An additional advantage of using audio-visual aids, mentioned by some authors, is their influence on students' motivation (Lonergan, 1984: 51). Namely, this way of representing the content, especially when it comes to television series that have an open ending, awakens the curiosity and imagination of students by leading them to think further about the represented material, but also represents a stimulus for language expression, i. e. comments or questions about the represented content. In this way, drama television series as didactic tools shift the focus of teaching from the professor to the students, giving them an active role in the discussion about the presented material (Brady, 1992: 172). If we connect these statements with the previously mentioned research, we can expect that the content represented in this way — in the format of a feature film or television series has a high didactic potential in terms of the highly expected percentage of adoption of the content represented in the mentioned formats. Confirmation of this attitude, in the field of medical content, is provided by scientific researches that show that the television series that were played were one of the main sources of information for the general population when it comes to HIV. Namely, a survey conducted by the National HIV Foundation in London revealed that most British teenagers learned about HIV from the life of Mark Fowler, one of the main characters of the famous English soap opera *EastEnders*, 1985–2022 (Burki, 2008: 328–330). Another study, sponsored by the Kaiser Family Foundation, found that 53% of viewers reported learning about a major health problem from the series they watched, and that 12% contacted their doctor as a result of the symptoms represented in the *ER* series (Burki, 2008: 423–424).

Certain authors, such as Álvarez Rojas and Timón Benítez, consider that the audio-visual narrative in the format of television series and PR representation has many functions. Some of them are informative, motivating, entertaining, expressive, research, didactic, metalinguistic and many others. Informative function, according to these authors, is reflected in the representations of phenomena that are adequate for a certain group of

viewers or that process the selected matter through the variety of topics and genres within which the given phenomenon is represented (Álvarez Rojas & Timón Benítez, 2010: 39–40). The motivating function is reflected in the further interest of the audience in the represented phenomenon through the development of dialogue, while the entertaining function causes emotional and cognitive experiences in the viewers. The expressive function allows getting to know the content and structure of the observed representation in the context of the entire narrative of the television series, while the metalinguistic function implies the integration and use of language through various means such as music, photography, scenography, but also the narrative itself (Álvarez Rojas & Timón Benítez, 2010: 39–40). The audience, as mentioned, is not only a passive recipient of the message of media texts, but actively collaborates with them in order to harmonize the meanings with their personal sensibilities, but also in relation to socially determined categories — race, class, gender and nationality. When we talk about medical students, we can say that by watching television series with medical topics, they passively receive information that contributes to their knowledge. However, there is probably something more complex going on. These series further expand their understanding of certain clinical problems, deepen the dynamics

of the patient-physician relationship, and provide satisfaction through decoding technical jargon and procedures (Rothman, 2000: 25–26).

Conclusions. Audio-visual means bring phenomena that are objectively, spatially or temporally unavailable to us. When it comes to medical students, and in the context of the topic of this paper, these tools can be used for representations of various health phenomena, but also representations of symptoms or the event of the disease itself. In this way, an audio-visual narrative is created that represents, for example, the working of the heart or a myocardial infarction. In the case of a fictional television series, this visual narrative is contextualized through the use of image, sound, color, and discourse that serve to construct the story (Sánchez Navarro, 2006: 95). Representations of different diseases, within PR presentation, can carry a message about the existence of different types of diseases, their symptoms, risk factors and preventive measures, with the existence of differences in the didactic nature of them (Barnet, 2007; Chang, 2013: 29–31). Of course, not all PR representations have the same detail of the symptoms of an individual disease, but they can certainly serve as a didactic supplement and material that students and professors will use as a supplement to education about various health phenomena.

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