

# СУЧАСНІ ТРЕНДИ ЖУРНАЛІСТИКИ, РЕКЛАМИ ТА PR

## AESTHETICS OF INFORMATION INVASION

**BILOTSEKOVETS Marina,**

*Candidate of pedagogical sciences, docent,  
associate professor*

*Sumy National Agrarian University*

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In September 2023 the course titled “Major EU practices on media literacy for boosting students’ critical thinking in the frame of target language learning” commenced in Sumy National Agrarian University, Ukraine, as a part of Jean Monnet project. It was designed to give its participants the tools for navigating the media landscape with confidence, evaluating information critically, and becoming responsible and informed citizens in our increasingly interconnected environment.

The authors consider this course to be especially essential in the period of the full-scale invasion in our country because, as McLuhan, an American researcher (2011) noted, “... a truly total war is the war with the help of information ...”. It means, that russian occupation did not begin with russian soldiers and tanks on our land, but earlier – with russian films and TV series on our screens (Ajir & Vaillant, 2018).

Moreover, one of the topics, which is taught during the course, is dedicated to the aesthetics of information invasion (Bilotsekovets, Fomenko, & Lushchyk, 2023). Primarily, the students learn the concept of infotainment. They get to know how people can be manipulated with the information through motion pictures. There is no resistance where no attack is expected. It is for this reason that films and television series are so actively used to promote the desired behaviors. In them, entertainment and the main plot are in the first place, so the secondary plots and the rationality behind them are not taken into account. The less intellectually complex a humanitarian object is, the more effective its impact on a mass audience will be, since all barriers to perception will be removed (Bilotsekovets, et al., 2023).

As it turned out, it is the most effective way to place necessary information in entertainment media. On the one hand, they are watched by

the largest number of people. On the other hand, it is there that they will be the least noticeable, since all attention is absorbed by the main plot. Firstly, the plot itself is built around the struggle between good and evil. Secondly, people love to gossip, TV series allow them to do that about their characters. Third, people are looking for role models to follow. Three types of heroes in terms of performing influence onto the mass consciousness were identified. The first two are carriers of positive and negative role models. They do not change in the course of the story, but are rewarded or punished for their type of behavior. The third type of behavior is transitional. It just matches the target audience and pushes them to change their behavior as well (Pocheptsov, 2018).

After that the students are suggested to regard several examples of informational products. They start with watching videos about the French TV series *Le Bureau des Légendes*<sup>1</sup> (2015), using additional information from electronic sources to illustrate main points for their projects about aesthetics of information invasion. *Le Bureau des Légendes* Canal+ series debuted on 27 April 2015. The program was an immediate breakout hit in France because of its gripping mixture of office politics peppered with high octane action in such exotic and newsworthy locations as Damascus, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Cambodia, Ukraine, and Russia. The show reflects “... a highly credible fictional landscape where the Cold War of the 20th century resurfaces and metastasizes into the Cyber war of the 21st century” (Edgerton, 2021).

The plot revolves around the life of agents of the General Directorate of the Direction générale de la Sécurité extérieure, (DGSE)<sup>2</sup>. The employees prepare agents for missions in different countries of the world; invent new personalities for them, reinforcing these biographies with fiction mixed with real facts, in the language of spies – legends. Guillaume Debailly, an illegal employee of the French intelligence department, returned to Paris after a six-year stay in Damascus “under the legend” of a university teacher Paul Lefevre. Returning to a “normal” life is proving difficult. In violation of all the rules of work, after returning, he did not break off relations with people who knew him in Syria and continues the affair that had begun in Damascus with a university teacher and daughter of high-ranking parents, Nadia El-Mansour, who also came to Paris. Another illegal employee of the French intelligence department Marina Loiseau works as a trainee researcher at the Institute of Seismology in Tehran under the supervision of IRGC Security Service and is looking for

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<sup>1</sup> The Office of Legends (French).

<sup>2</sup> French External Security Service (French).

candidates for recruitment at the institute and among Iranian acquaintances. As a result, she is captured by Iranian counterintelligence and awaits help from Paris (Le Bureau des Légendes, 2015).

The fifth season begins with the appearance in the newspaper *Le Figaro* information about the death of a French agent in an explosion in the Donbass. However, viewers soon learn that the French intelligence officer did not die and the DGSE intends to use its surviving agent Guillaume Debailly to conduct an operation of recruiting his own recruiter, senior FSB officer Mikhail Karlov, played by the Ukrainian actor Oleksii Gorbunov. Episodes that seem to take place in Moscow were filmed in Kyiv. In particular, in the role of the facade of the “Institute of Seismology named after Bulgakov” is performed by the building of the Kyiv Polytechnic Institute (Le Bureau des Légendes, 2022).

The series received a large number of positive reviews, both in France and abroad, and won several awards. Critics recognized the good performance of the actors and the tense, well-written and realized, interesting script. Meanwhile, Russian fans of *Le Bureau des Légendes* ambiguously appreciated the continuation of the story. On social networks, they are continuously writing about their disappointment, about the fact that the series “lost the old rhythm, action and adventurousness” and some stories “seemed completely implausible” (Edgerton, 2021).

To complete their projects students are discussing the following issues:

✓ What do the concepts of “the Cold War of the 20th century” and “the Cyberwar of the 21st century” mean?

✓ Which real situations of military aggressions are depicted in the TV show?

✓ Which narratives are translated in the TV show? For whom? Do they coincide with the official position of the French government?

✓ Did you notice any facts mentioned in the show that would not be possible in reality?

✓ What do you think was the reason that Russian fans of *Le Bureau des Légendes* did not like the last seasons of the show?

Presenting their projects to the group, students have made the conclusion: new media giants, regional communities, geopolitical doctrines are all working together to reshape the information space. The interaction of the images reproduced by mass media and the society that perceives them is marked by technical innovations, but the problems that initiate this interaction require resolution.

After all, in order to present the truth, not even during the war, but in peaceful time as well, infotainment arose – the truth that is presented in an

attractive shell for consumers. Mass consciousness is not engaged in fact-checking, it either follows them or it doesn't (Pocheptsov, 2018).

A sign of an information campaign is its scale, when everything – television, newspapers, and social media – begins to work in a single mode, almost with a single point of view, which is strongly replicated. In the framework of television, in the news they say, on talk shows they are fixed, and in the final news programs, when it is “depicted” in detail. So the trap for mass consciousness closes. A person with a different point of view will almost automatically refuse it or remain silent. Only those people, whose point of view is generally accepted, actively express themselves. That is how television may impose such point of view, which may not exist in reality.

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