A socio-philosophical analysis of manipulation and persuasion in the digital world

Nasrullaev Murodjon Rakhmatilla ogli

researcher

Namangan State University, Uzbekistan

Abstract: The article examines the historical evolution of the concepts of persuasion and manipulation from ancient Greek philosophy to the moral teachings of Immanuel Kant. It also studies the impact of visual communication tools, in particular social networks, online advertising and virtual reality, on the human mind in the digital environment, and reveals the ethical aspects of manipulation and persuasion in the digital world based on I. Kant's categorical imperative principle and Van Dijk's theories of discourse analysis. The article aims to increase media literacy in the digital environment, develop critical thinking and reduce the negative consequences of manipulation by ensuring information security, and seek philosophical understanding of the problems of manipulation and persuasion in the digital world and ways to solve them.

Keywords: persuasion, manipulation, digital world, visual communication, moral philosophy, media literacy, critical thinking, information security, categorical imperative, discourse analysis, social networks, virtual reality.

It is not for nothing that the modern era is called the "digital age" - information technologies have changed the way people think, relate to each other, and even their physical environment. Luciano Floridi calls it the "fourth revolution": in the context of the infosphere, the boundary between online and offline realities is disappearing. In this context, the dominance of visual

communication raises new ethical dilemmas - how honest or manipulative is the influence through images? From the point of view of Kant's categorical imperative, any method of influence must pass the test of whether it can be a universal law. This article attempts to conduct such a test in the context of modern practice.

According [1] to the Oxford English Dictionary, this term has existed since the 1960s, and its first written form is associated with Richard Leghorn (a physicist in the US Department of Defense, who worked for governments mainly in the field of intelligence satellites and photography). The spread and use of this term became widespread in the 70s and 80s with the rapid development of personal computers and information technology. The introduction of this concept into philosophy occurred in the 21st century. According to the analytical philosopher Luciano Floridi, information technology is changing not only our thinking, but also our physical environment, our relationship with ourselves and others. The boundary between online and offline life is increasingly disappearing, and we live in a kind of "online life" called *the infosphere (information sphere)* (because we exist simultaneously in virtual reality and in virtual reality) . According to him, we are living in a period of direct paradigm shifts, which he calls the fourth revolution after Copernicus, Darwin, and Freud [2].

In this era, along with written information, a flood of visual information pours into people's minds in such quantity and speed that they cannot process it in real time. We see millions of advertisements every day and subconsciously accept their hidden or explicit messages. Therefore, in contrast to textual influence, issues of visual influence come to the fore. The impact of images is felt faster than that of texts, because processing images is faster, and thinking is also in the form of images. Perceiving and understanding text is slower and requires more cognitive effort. Visual communication in the digital age raises a number of

---

[1] https://preview.oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/95568

[2] Floridi, Luciano, The Fourth Revolution, How the infosphere is reshaping human reality. Oxford University Press . 2014.

ethical questions, to which there are no clear answers, but it is important and necessary to talk about them.

What methods of persuasion does visual communication offer? What is persuasion and what is manipulation? These questions, in addition to defining concepts, lead to the question "what is manipulation?" Is manipulation always bad or can it be justified in some cases? Is persuasion always good?

There is a vast literature on good and evil, but our goal is not to explain the difference between the two concepts or their relationship. We use the concepts of "good" and "bad" here in the Kantian sense: that is, that which is morally right is "good". To be moral is to seek the right action in each specific situation. In Kantian philosophy, morality is based on the concept of "good intention". In this approach, the morality of every human action depends on its inner intentions, not on its consequences. Good intention is an action that is guided solely by a sense of moral obligation, without personal interest or external pressures. Kant's "categorical imperative" emphasizes the principle that human actions can be a universal law. The essence of this is that each individual should evaluate his or her own actions in such a way that if these actions were to become a general rule for all people, society would be stable and just. This is, in simple terms, a philosophical expression of the rule: "Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself". The categorical imperative implies two basic principles in making ethical decisions:

1. That our actions can become a universal law.

2. To see any person as valuable in their own right, not as an end in themselves.

In this approach, actions such as lying or manipulation fail the test of the categorical imperative, because if they were to become a universal law, the system of trust and communication between people would be completely broken. Thus, in Kant's philosophy, a moral action is an action that is not only in accordance with personal interests, but can also be a general law for all rational beings.

With the development of information technologies, methods of persuasion and manipulation are taking on new forms. The dominance of visual content, content created with the help of artificial intelligence, and the global influence of social networks have made these processes much more complicated. The purpose of this study is to analyze modern mechanisms of influence based on ancient philosophical traditions and clarify their ethical aspects.

The dominance of visual content in the modern information environment is based on the natural properties of human perception. Moving images and visual materials have a direct effect on the brain, being perceived much faster and more effectively than textual information. *This is due to the sensitivity of the human psyche to visual stimuli, since the brain automatically processes images faster . Visual aids have a dual effect: they can both simplify complex concepts and be used for manipulation .*

From an ethical perspective, visual impact itself is a neutral phenomenon – whether it is positive or negative is determined by the goals, methods of application and consequences. For example, while health warning posters or documentaries about environmental problems are intended to have a positive impact, visual content based on partial truths in political propaganda can be used for negative purposes. The powerful impact of visual communication requires that everyone actively participating in the modern media environment must increase their level of visual literacy. This includes not only the ability to detect manipulations, but also the ability to use visual tools effectively.

The role of visual communication tools in modern society is increasingly growing. The line between persuasion and manipulation can sometimes be blurred, since both processes are aimed at shaping a certain behavior or worldview. The difference is that in persuasion, the principles of openness and honesty are fundamental, while in manipulation, indirect methods are used. With the development of digital technologies, the possibilities for influencing through visual tools have expanded significantly. In particular, social networks and

multimedia platforms have provided an opportunity for individuals and organizations in power to expand their sphere of influence. The rapid spread and deep impact of visual content have made it an important tool of modern political and social discourse. *The rapid adoption of visual content makes it not only an effective means of communication, but also a powerful weapon of manipulation. This situation, from a Kantian point of view, poses the risk of distorting people's autonomous decisions by indirectly influencing their minds.*

The effectiveness of visual manipulation lies in its ability to influence the deepest layers of human perception. Images and videos penetrate people's minds faster and deeper than texts, which makes them especially valuable. However, the power of visual tools also requires great responsibility, as their misuse can have serious consequences for society.

While the concepts of persuasion and manipulation are different, it is not possible to say that persuasion is only morally positive and manipulation is only morally negative. However, it can be said that the increasing role of visual media in the digital age gives great influence and power to those in power or those seeking power.

The line between persuasion and manipulation is not always clear, as their moral implications can vary depending on the environment, context, and intent. The main difference is that in persuasion, arguments are presented openly and transparently, while in manipulation, unconscious emotions, cognitive deficits, or psychological weaknesses are exploited. The moral assessment is not strictly the same. In some cases, manipulation can be used with good intentions - for example, to prevent a person from making a bad decision that is dangerous to their health. However, in most cases, it restricts human freedom, and therefore is criticized. With the development of digital technologies, visual and psychological methods of influence have become even more powerful. Through tools such as graphics, video montage, and algorithmic propaganda, it is possible to significantly influence people's thinking. However, much more research is still needed to

determine how effective or harmful this influence is. Context and intention play an important role in understanding persuasion and manipulation. Any method of influence must be within the framework of human rights and ethical standards.

Thus, while the concepts of persuasion and manipulation are different, it is not possible to say that persuasion is only morally good and manipulation is only morally bad. Furthermore, the development of images and moving images in the digital age increases the impact and gives manipulators unlimited power.

The problem of persuasion and manipulation has existed in philosophy since the beginning. In Plato's Republic, Socrates says: "If anyone has the right to lie to the enemy or to citizens in the interests of the state, only the leaders of the state have the right, no one else can use these means"[3]. Aristotle's Rhetoric is entirely devoted to influence, since this science does not have a specific subject, "its task is not to persuade, but to reveal the possible methods of persuasion in all spheres"[4]. He distinguishes three aspects of persuasion: *ethos (the character of the speaker or orator)*, *pathos (the effect on the audience)*, and *logos (the speech itself, which proves something)*. Persuasion occurs in such a way that the speaker conveys his speech in a convincing manner. The ancient philosophers did not discuss manipulation separately. Manipulation (not as a concept, but as a phenomenon) appeared in the Renaissance through Machiavelli, who included flattery and deception among the virtues of rulers[5]. The concept of "manipulation" entered the French language in the 18th century: *manipulation* , derived from the Latin word *manipulus (a handful, a bundle, a military unit)* , appeared. It should be noted that manipulation was originally a word with a positive meaning, applied to individuals who were able to skillfully manipulate things or people.

The bloody wars of the 20th century and the experience of totalitarian systems gave a great impetus to the development of persuasion and manipulation

---

[3]Plato. Gosudarstvo. - M.: Izdatelstvo AST , 2016. – 410 p.
[4]Aristotle. Rhetoric. - M.: Eksmo-Press , 2019. – P.10.
[5]Machiavelli N. Gosudar. M.: Planeta, 1990 . - 84 p.

technologies. States began to use new psychological methods to control their citizens and shape public opinion. This process led to the development of communication sciences, as scientists tried to understand the mechanisms of mass control. The main difference between persuasion and manipulation from a socio-psychological point of view is that in the process of persuasion, the recipient retains his free will and the right to make a choice. In manipulation, however, an indirect influence is exerted on the individual's consciousness, controlling his decisions through a kind of "programming". As Van Dijk notes, political discourse itself is often manipulative in nature and is a means of consolidating power.

Just as Plato justified the right of state leaders to lie, modern politicians appeal to the principle that "the ends justify the means". The difference is that today, such manipulation affects millions of people simultaneously through artificial intelligence.

The most dangerous aspect of manipulation in modern society is its subtlety and often imperceptibility. Manipulation through the media, advertising, and social networks can significantly change people's worldview. At the same time, the process of persuasion is based on open and transparent communication, in which arguments and facts are discussed. Understanding these two concepts is crucial for developing critical thinking skills in the modern information environment. In order not to get lost in the flow of information and make independent decisions, it is necessary to identify manipulative techniques, as well as be ready to persuade based on honest arguments.

In the digital age, the line between persuasion and manipulation is becoming increasingly blurred. The power and speed of visual communication make it particularly valuable, but also dangerous. Kant's principle of the categorical imperative remains relevant in the modern information environment - any method of influence must pass the test of whether it can be a universal law.

Improving media literacy, developing critical thinking skills, and understanding moral responsibility are among the most important tasks for modern society.

The line between persuasion and manipulation is a subject of significant debate in philosophy, and their ethical implications and impact on human freedom are not firmly established. The main difference is that **persuasion** is an attempt to change opinions based on open, logical, and honest arguments. In this case, the recipient is free to form his or her own opinion. **Manipulation**, on the other hand, uses indirect methods (emotional appeals, selective presentation of facts, psychological pressure) to induce a person to make a decision that he or she does not intend. In this process, his or her autonomy is limited. Some theorists do not necessarily see manipulation as negative, focusing on its **purpose** and **outcome**. For example, parents may unknowingly use manipulative methods to teach children good habits. Similarly, in the field of health or safety, a certain degree of influence may be justified in order to prevent people from making bad decisions. However, **the degree of honesty of manipulation** remains a matter of debate. If it is within the bounds of what is morally acceptable (for example, "legitimate manipulation"), it can be approved. But it is often criticized for violating free choice. **Openness, rationality, and moral intent** are the main criteria in distinguishing between persuasion and manipulation. Any method of influence must respect the person's ability to think independently.

Conclusion.

1. Kant's categorical imperative is seen as the moral criterion for manipulation and persuasion in the digital world. According to Kant's teaching, each person should perceive other people as valuable ends in themselves, not as a means to an end. Manipulation and persuasion in the digital world often aim to use people as a means to their own ends, which contradicts Kant's moral principle.

2. Van Dijk's theory of discourse analysis helps us understand how manipulation and persuasion are carried out in the digital world. Discourse analysis shows how meanings are created through texts, images and videos and how they affect the human mind. Manipulation and persuasion in the digital world are often carried out through the dissemination of false information, distortion of facts and emotional appeal.

3. Improving media literacy in the digital world is an important tool to combat manipulation and persuasion. Media literacy helps people to critically evaluate information, identify sources, and distinguish false information from truth. Therefore, improving media literacy should become an integral part of the education system, and it is appropriate to use modern pedagogical strategies in this process.

4. It is necessary to improve the code of ethics and legislation to combat manipulation and persuasion in the digital world. It is necessary to develop ethical rules for the use of information technologies and create legal mechanisms to hold accountable those involved in manipulation and persuasion in the digital environment. It is also necessary to strengthen measures to ensure information security and protect personal data.

Suggestions and recommendations.

1. **Develop** a national digital code of ethics that sets ethical standards for the use of digital technologies, aims to combat harmful forms of manipulation and persuasion, and reflects principles such as the accuracy of information, respect for personal data, freedom of expression, and responsible dissemination of information.

2. **Organizing** seminars, trainings, discussions, and intellectual games among young people and adults to develop critical thinking, information analysis, and lie detection skills, and conducting meetings with information security experts, philosophers, and journalists

3.   **Creating an online platform ''Digital Hygiene'' to educate the population on the safe and responsible use of digital technologies, protect personal data, avoid online fraud, and teach methods for identifying false information.**

REFERENCES USED

1. https :// preview . oed . com / viewdictionaryentry / Entry /95568

2. Floridi, Luciano, The Fourth Revolution, How the infosphere is reshaping human reality. Oxford University Press . 2014.

3. Plato. Gosudarstvo. - M.: Izdatelstvo AST , 2016. – 410 p.

4. Aristotle. Rhetoric. — M.: Eksmo-Press , 2019. – 256 p.

5. Machiavelli N. Gosudar. M.: Planeta, 1990 . - 84 p.

6. Immanuel Kant. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* . Translated by Mary Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. (Original work published 1785), p. 76 .

7. Akhmedova M.A. Philosophy. Textbook. Tashkent: Teacher, 2020. Pages 221–228.

8. Schiller G. Manipulyatory soznaniem [Text]. - M., 1980. - 378 p

9. Kara-Murza S. G. Manipulation soznaniem. - M.: "Eksmo", 2003. Str. 45

10. Yakubov S. "Information Society: Not Fantasy, but Reality" / "Tafakkur", issue 4, 2007.