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INFLUENCE OF AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA IN THE ANALYSES OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

ВПЛИВ АУДІОВІЗУАЛЬНОГО МЕДІА НА АНАЛІЗ МІЖНАРОДНОЇ ПОЛІТИЧНОЇ КОМУНІКАЦІЇ

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The article dwells upon the original research on the subject of analyses of aspects of international political communication employing the prognostic function of audiovisual media. Shown is certain, lesser-studied effectiveness of creative approaches and "artistic filter" in the field of international political studies. The author considers the problems and stresses on advantages of the use of narrative fiction audiovisual works as additional empirical sources in the research of international political processes.

Key words: international political communication, audiovisual media, universal code of movies, empirical sources, political studies.

У статті викладено оригінальне дослідження аналізу аспектів міжнародної політичної комунікації за допомогою прогностичної функції аудіовізуального медіа. Розглядається малодосліджена ефективність творчих підходів та «артистичного фільтру» в царині міжнародних політичних досліджень. Підкреслено проблеми та переваги використання художніх аудіовізуальних творів у якості додаткових емпіричних джерел у дослідженні міжнародних політичних процесів.

Ключові слова: міжнародна політична комунікація, аудіовізуальні медіа, універсальний код кінематографу, дослідження політичної комунікації, емпіричні джерела, політичні дослідження.

В статье изложено оригинальное исследование анализа аспектов международной политической коммуникации при помощи прогностической функции аудиовизуального медиа. Рассматривается определённая, малоисследованная эффективность творческих подходов и «артистического фильтра» в сфере международных политических исследований. Подчёркнуто проблемы и преимущества художественных аудиовизуальных произведений в качестве дополнительных эмпирических источников в исследовании международных политических процессов.

Ключевые слова: международная политическая коммуникация, аудиовизуальные медиа, универсальный код кинематографа, исследования политической коммуникации, эмпирические источники, политические исследования.

The purpose of this article, what we are implying to achieve with it, is to pinpoint how research of international political communication rarely brings up major points which sterns its own difficulty, while we also want to bring to attention the facts of audiovisual media actually being of importance to international political communication, providing additional means of analyses in that field of study. Audiovisual media never achieved the in-depth attention of international political studies: merely researched as a *result* of international political communication, sometimes as an additional empirical source aiding scarce literature on the topic. Its logical maximum is often regarded as little less then an aspect of *"soft power"*, a larger, well-researched concept in which audiovisual media as a separate object of research effectively drowns, not getting a chance to shine as a topic on its own, despite in our opinion it is very much deserves attention in that respect.

Studying of specific aspects and objects of influence in political international communications is also not as common as logically should be considering that modern day globalized world brings even most specific situations to a brand new global level. Such studies could be found in the state of constant transformation, influenced by great changes of processes of communication (mainly due to technological advancements). That does not make things easier for a researcher in the field, who already encounters certain ambiguity as to what exactly should be researched. The difficulty of research in international communication was recognized in the published works way back in 1950's, albeit since then situation changed even more drastically with the arrival of Internet – a revolutionizing platform which brought communication to a whole new level and made some of the more specific communities and their musings recognizable on an international level. Audience members was provided with means of their own to reflect on any global situation and actually partially influence the outcome. Later advancements in social networking proved: even the slightest shift of people's judgment might affect politics on international level with as little as small amount of information needed. With introduction of streaming video platforms Internet became dominated with audiovisual media. It had a deep connection to it from the start as film industry, for example, was a focus of numerous websites even when it

was not possible to have neither sufficient quality, nor convenient way to watch videos, which are now there thanks to streaming platforms.

Retrospectively, audiovisual media had some influence over international political landscape from the start as manipulation and documentation of information was very important for the medium achieving even more importance when it was brought closer to audience in the form of television. However, despite evident larger effectiveness of such media in terms of multiple layers of information, it is hard to deny that its influence was largely under control in the XX century since distribution was expensive enough to filter a lot of potentially influential media and make it more "domestic". Soviet Union could serve as an example of such filtering employed almost universally to media both brought in and out of the country: as much as imported media should have been safe for the ideological doctrine and went through several levels of censorship, exported media should have reflected the Soviet values as attractive enough for foreign audiences (as a result, exported Soviet media often had inserts of what was usually censored in the imported productions, which is a topic on its own, hardly related to a subject of this article), something from the field of *universal values*. Whole reason why dissident Soviet directors like Andrei Tarkovsky were allowed to make movies they wanted to make was because their movies had sufficient enough part of Soviet ideological doctrine intermixed with sensibilities closer to those of European audience.

Universal values are often addressed in conjunction with many scientific approaches in philosophy, political science, sociology and psychology. Still, somehow the term seems to be rather vaguely described in all of them, leaving a lot to desire for those, who will address the concept in their theoretical and practical assignments. For some indiscriminant reason depiction of universal values in culture on a global scale rarely sparks any interest of political science, despite how global and overwhelming certain aspects of popular culture may (and sometimes were proven to) be in the age of global networks and digital revolution.

«Popular» and «universal» are far from being equal concepts but there seems to be just a right amount of similarity in two of them to be very effective in combined efforts, as proven by massive popular music concerts dedicated to global problems, which raise money to fight such and/or dedicated to spread awareness of such problems. An example of such event was held by ANTIAIDS foundation on September 12, 2008 – a grandiose free concert by famed rock band Queen gathered an audience of 350,000 people on the central square of Kharkiv. It's impact was doubled by the fact that on December 1, 2008 filmed version of the concert was released theatrically in cinemas all over Ukraine. As founder of ANTIAIDS Olena Pinchuk (known at the time as Elena Franchuk) put it:

«We're trying to involve as many people as possible in the fight against AIDS in Ukraine. Our awareness projects were built on music, paintings and fashion. And now, it is time for cinema. It is vital for our work as movie theater is a place where young people spend their time, meaning that we can reach them there» [4]. Queen at the time were, of course, no strangers to audiovisual media themselves – often credited for single-handedly making music video a regular practice for record companies with 1975's «Bohemian Rhapsody»; they also extended their influence to feature films in 1980's, writing original score for «Flash Gordon» (dir. Mike Hodges, written by Lorenzo Semple Jr. and Michael Allin, based on the characters created by Alex Raymond, Starling Films, Dino De Laurentiis Company, 1980) and (in an arguably more known instance) original songs for a cult film «Highlander» (dir. Russell Mulcahy, written by Gregory Widen, Peter Bellwood and Larry Ferguson from a story by Gregory Widen, Thorn EMI Screen Entertainment, Highlander Productions Limited, Davis-Panzer Productions, 1986) [11]. It feels natural that this time their influence was protracted to an audio-visual form as well, but why was it so crucial to re-release the concert in theatres, as a feature-length film? The answer is not simple, but it may be theorized that Queen's international appeal transcends well through a certain *universal code of movies* – certain components of audiovisual media which could be comprehended and deciphered regardless of language or cultural background. Such *a quasi-concept* may be combined well with universal values, itself a concept which feels from being scientifically formulated. While the term *universal code of movies* was coined by authors of this article as a temporary quasi-concept to illustrate the formulated hypotheses, including those of the article «Universality of movies in the international political communication» [15], *universal values* is a term that has been around for decades, and yet seems to thoroughly lack quite a few key defining moments, sparking a wide discussion in the scientific circles, used extensively in philosophy and psychology. Political studies, while acknowledging existence of the term are visibly reluctant to use it, perhaps due to a severe lack of unified theoretical approach (much more tolerated in the afore-mentioned scientific disciplines) because it is usually connected with concepts of morals and morality.

Certain concepts of political theories such as multiculturalism are trying to preserve variety of cultural and social systems by also reaching some universal elements. In other words they're attempting to combine humanity through the means of complex values which should be understood anywhere. In his lecture on global ethics delivered on December 12, 2003 in Tübingen University, Germany and named «Do We Still Have Universal Values?» then-Secretary-General of UN Kofi Annan stated that «values of peace, free-

dom, social progress, equal rights and human dignity, enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, are no less valid today than when, over half a century ago, those documents were drafted by representatives of many different nations and cultures» [3]. The same year a second, paperback print of Francis Fukuyama's book «Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution» was published, which also argued that inability of isolation of any part of a human society in a modern world makes a certain set of universal values crucially needed for normal functioning [7]. What was stated by two key figures in the world of international politics in 2003 is still relevant thirteen years later. Moreover, appealing to universal values has become a crucial way for politics to get through the growing ignorance on population's part.

Co-called *fakes*, spreading all over the news, unfortunately, is very common occurrence in the modern world. It is a much rare occasion when something was actually *right* and is yet still disregarded as *fake*, which is exactly what was evident in 2016-2017 in Post-Soviet countries (and, mainly, Russia) regarding a situation on whether popular satirical cartoon show *«The Simpsons»* (Created by Matt Groening, developed by James L. Brooks and Sam Simon, Gracie Films in association with 20th Century Fox, 1989-Present) predicted Donald Trump's presidency. An example of such news item being «debunked» comes from a blog post by Russian 2X2 TV channel (which airs «The Simpsons» officially in Russia), directly stating in the headline «The Simpsons» had not predicted Trump's win in 2000» and yet managing to directly contradict that in the statement itself saying that «In 2000 The Simpsons had actually predicted Trump's win». While the article also dwells upon the fact that common illustration of «prediction» shared through social network was actually taken from 2015's special *Trumptastic Voyage* (dir. David Silverman, written by Al Jean, Gracie Films), it is also obvious that the headline contradicts the meaning of a statement, even if, as stated in the post, *«Overall, that picture is 80% fake»* [1] which still leaves 20% of useable information in the picture (although, of course, no one actually acoounted). Episode in question is the seventeenth episode of the eleventh season of the show, named *Bart to the Future* (dir. Michael Marcantel, written by Dan Greany) in which one of the show's protagonists, Bart Simpson gets a glimpse into the future, specifically in the year 2030. In that variant of the show's future (which is not, by the way, considered canon) Trump becomes a president of the United States at an unspecified point prior to this year, leaving country to a successor with a «budget crunch» [2]. Al Jean, long-time producer and writer of the show, addressed the fact in a an interview and explained that prediction was actually a joke with a logical basis: in 2000 Trump was talking about

running for president as a reform party candidate. It should be noted that media attention to that fact, while not reaching it's peak was still there prior to presidential elections, as actual writer of the *Bart to the Future* episode, Dan Greany was also asked about the prediction in an interview for *The Hollywood Reporter*, dated March 16, 2016. In it he stated that *«The Simpsons has always kind of embraced the over-the-top side of American culture … and [Trump] is just the fulfillment of that»* [10]. Even that was not the earliest known addressing of the fact, as British newspaper *Metro* did an article on the fact back on July 30, 2015. [8] Interestingly enough, at the time world was all about comparing predictions from audiovisual media to real life, as on October 21, 2015 a cult science fiction movie *Back to the Future Part II* (dir. Robert Zemeckis, written by Bob Gale and Robert Zemeckis, Universal Pictures, Amblin Entertainment, U-Turn Productions, 1989) was literally «back to the future» as said date was a destination time of the time travel from 1985 in the movie. As in case with *The Simpsons*, writer Bob Gale was also interviewed about certain predictions, including the one about Donald Trump. Gale confirmed that similarities noted by audience between the latter and one of the main antagonists of the movie, Buford «Biff» Tannen (from alternative timeline of 1985) were in fact a deliberate of writers. [5] Although portions of Tannen's personality that were based on Trump were his 27-floor casino (Trump built a 37-floor Trump Plaza Hotel in 1984), advocacy of plastic surgery, operations in real estate as well as, partially, looks and personality, mainly another portion which is considered a prediction – Tannen using his wealth to influence the Republican Party before assuming some political powers on his own, which leads to isolation of the the town of Hill Valley as an autonomous zone, every citizen of which is encouraged to call him «America's greatest living folk hero», fulfilling the same *«over-the-top side of American culture»* as Trump [14].

Both predictions about Trump from 1989 and 2000 are actually culturally interconnected – episode *Bart to the Future* is not only named after *Back to the Future* franchise, it is also directly visually and plot-wise influenced by it. So, in short, what we have here is that two connected audiovisual media ventures that had fictionalized characters based on Donald Trump (one of which is eponymous) predicting a really close approximation (especially if combined and compared) of an actual political event from 2016. Of course «prediction» is a loose term. For example, statistically, being world's longest running current TV show on its 28th season in 2016, *The Simpsons* were nearly bound to get a few things right – and they did it more then once. It could be considered a part of phenomenon which even has a name in pop culture, amusingly applied after an episode of the rival satirical cartoon show, *South Park* (Created by Trey

Parker and Matt Stone, developed by Brian Graden, Comedy Central, Braniff, Comedy Partners, South Park Studios, 1997-Present), «*The Simpsons Already Did It*» (dir. Trey Parker, written by Trey Parker, David R. Goodman, Kyle McCulloch, Glasgow Phillips, Tim Talbot, 2002) [13]. Still, mere fact that writers of an animated show predicted someone's presidency 16 ears prior to elections, while countless analysts and sociologists failed to do so immediately before such, provides for a food for thoughts. What was done through the «artistic filter» here is actually very similar to precognitive analyses and/or logical-analytical analyses. Both approaches are far from being pseudoscientific and are implemented successfully in a lot of humanitarian studies, including political studies in the international relations. [15]

Among the conclusions that we can make is that at this point methodology of media research in the international political relations has something left out, underestimating crucial concepts of audiovisual media appeal and not concentrating enough on fiction media, which at times tend to predict and even shape political situations. It is further evident in the fact that United States of America, world's largest and most experienced provider of popular culture content, is (at times) as puzzled as anyone else when audiovisual media tends to predict something in a way of phenomena often called "life imitates art". One of the youngest but also more popular art forms, tendencies in audiovisual media are harder to predict, due to lack of centuries of development literature, music and fine arts have, which allows for prognosis as an extension of comparison. In 2000 (the same year when *The Simpsons* predicted Trump's presidency) fewer people were able to tell that Internet will be able to rival television in terms of audiovisual content, while such thoughts were evident and not uncommon in audiovisual media itself. Nowadays we have internet community proclaiming Trump's win as its own, theorizing overwhelming influence of Internet meme culture on Trump's wnning political image. It was even specifically noted by some of the internet users that Trump winning the elections as a victory of *memes*, an assortment of freely available entertaining internet products regarding any possible topics which are pre-dominantly based and shaped by audiovisual media (TV series, movies, cartoon shows, anime, video games and so on) [9].

Controlling the audiovisual media through means such as censorship would not be of any help in modern society. In order to make situation more effective and controllable, required is not a restriction of artists and entertainers, but a way to take into a scientific consideration such thing as an "artistic filter", a very important and influential layer of international information. Also needed is to find out what exactly influences events on a political scale. Such understanding is problematic without certain universal codes, as we can't reach full understanding of specific cases without knowing the specs on how the system of audiovisual media entertainment works. That also requires taking into a consideration the fact that nowadays market of such re-shapes rapidly, providing massive abilities for independent media outlets to be as influential as large news media and big-time Hollywood studios. For political studies in the international relations, audiovisual media, while not exactly being terra incognita, is a place of only a certain, rather mild level of familiarity. It could and should be enriched by further research, as security of the situation pretty much depends on processes of international communication witnessed in a conglomeration of social media and audiovisual media, sometimes taking a form of interactive new media.

Underestimation of how much audiovisual content influences political decisions and underlying events which have their effect on a global scale, as well as whole layers of information such media might provide for both retrospective and current studies of the situation left us behind on any possible level, each time providing for a surprise in the situation when we definitely should have seen something coming. Considering that nowadays popular culture grows on a plain new international (and interactive!) level, influence of media of which audiovisual one is one of the most effective and dominant, we are drawn to conclusion that we could not ignore it in the political studies of international relations. Leaving out from the studies in the post-post-modern world results in situation as odd and obstructive as "post-post-modern world" formulation itself. A situation which could be basically summarized as lack of better terms. Coming up with authored terms such as *universal code of movies* is a natural solution for studies which are, if far from inception, are still only entering the formal scientific doctrine. Ignoring the aspects that are influencing the field but are usually dismissed and considered a manipulation or, at best, a minor side of using the soft power in the globalized world of today might be a seriously worrying omission in political studies. Disregarding a whole level of information is what evidenced through the drawn examples. Scarce coordination between a cultural studies and political studies prevents us from noticing relevant information which could have been used for actual and very serious forecasting and analyses of events.

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