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PHD THESIS

SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATIONS OF PROTEST LIFE-WORLD IN MEDIA: COMPARATIVE CROSS-NATIONAL ANALYSIS OF EUROMAIDAN CASE

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Summary

The overall goal of this dissertation is to accomplish the operationalization of the symbol theory. This enables a comparative cross-national study of sole symbols, as well as complex symbolic representations of protest life-world in culture, in general, and in media, in particular, by means of quantitative and qualitative methods.

Research objectives and methods

One of the tasks of the given research is to demonstrate how it is possible to study symbols in media texts. The other task is an attempt to explore whether symbols could bridge objects, contexts, events, persons of the external world with the phenomena of consciousness. In other words, this study aims to investigate whether it is possible to conceptualize symbols in media as meanings that mirror the content of consciousness rather than mirror things of external world. Symbol as such is less interesting than symbols as a mirror of the internal life of consciousness. With regard to this, the research is focused on symbolic representations of the life-world, namely experience, rather than the events as such. One more task is to study how big sets of symbols are combined into complex symbolic representations and to compare them across online-editions of print media of three countries: Ukraine, Poland, and Germany.

This study combines a quantitative method, namely content analysis, and a qualitative method, namely, analysis of symbols' qualities. The proposed methodology consists of coding of symbols; measurement of their visibility in the general amount of coded symbols by means of content analysis; generation of clouds of concepts that symbols express; interpretation of symbols in terms of phenomenological sociology; qualitative analysis of symbols; definition and interpretation of dominant symbolic representations of the EuroMaidan life-world on the basis of coded symbols and their concepts; comparison of symbolic representations across national print media of Ukraine, Poland and Germany.

Chapter outline

The Chapter I is the introduction to the study. The Chapter II presents the theoretical framework for this media research. It proposes the review of the Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms. It also contains a section on the reconsiderations of the Cassirer's theory, the definitions of representations in phenomenology and post-structuralism, the review of other theories of symbols, major categories of media representations, and basic reflections on symbols in the phenomenological theory of life-worlds.

The Chapter III is dedicated to methodology. Research questions are articulated in this Chapter. It also provides the rationale for the choice of the case study of EuroMaidan, media sample, period of study, categorization of the protest life-world, typology of symbols, and explains coding procedure and measure of content analysis. The criteria for the qualitative analysis of symbolic relations, for the comparison of data across media of three countries, between tabloid and quality press are also set in the Chapter III.

The Chapters IV, V, VI provide the quantitative and qualitative analyses of data for three countries under study: Ukraine, Poland, Germany. This data analysis comprises coding of symbols, their typifying, measuring their visibility, interpretation of their meanings (denotation,

connotation, signification), generating clouds of their concepts, their interpretation in terms of structures of subjective experience, namely, protest life-world.

The Chapter VII is dedicated to the comparison of symbolic representations of the EuroMaidan life-world across media of Ukraine, Poland, and Germany, as well as between tabloids and quality weeklies. Ten most visible symbols in the media of three countries are compared, as well as the cloud of their common concepts is generated. The dominant symbolic representations are identified, data mining and statistics for them are generated by means of the software RapidMiner. The qualities of spatiality, temporality, numerality, and power relations in their symbols are compared to test whether there are some salient trends which could allow to speak about media as a symbolic form. The Chapter VIII provides the conclusions of the study.

Research findings and conclusions

The study found that symbols-products dominate over other types of symbols in all media outlets. The shares of symbol-concepts in the general number of symbols is bigger in the quality publications. Symbol-processes play the marginal role in all media under study. Therefore, the journalism of processes is still rather an ideal than the reality of the contemporary European media. Instead, journalism of events and situations dominates.

I managed to identify the cross-national symbol that is common to all three countries - Ukraine, Poland, and Germany - although its meanings could vary across cultures. This is the symbol-concept "barricade". It is the most visible symbol in the Polish and German press, and it is the third most visible symbol in the Ukrainian media. The other notable example is the symbol-concept "Berkut". It is the most visible in the Ukrainian media and is the second most visible in the Polish media. However, it does not belong to the highly visible symbols in the German media.

Every national media outlet has found some tangible things in the external world that it frequently used in its descriptions of the protesters' lived experiences. In this matter, media are closer to arts and history. In the Ukrainian media these were batons and shields, both weapons were used by the police and protesters. In the Polish media these included flag of Ukraine, cobbles, cocktail Molotov, and tents. For the German media these symbols-products were cobbles, fire, cocktail Molotov, and tear gas.

The most visible concepts identified in the Ukrainian media by means of cloud generation were violence, terror, delegitimation of power, civil society, dictatorship, self-defense, and solidarity; in the Polish media - the concepts of solidarity, violence, massacre, delegitimation of power, democracy, change, patriotism; in the German - the concepts of violence, self-defense, change, terror, conflict, responsibility. Violence was the most visible concept across all media and countries. Therefore, the studied media described protesters' experience predominantly through the concepts of violence, terror, delegitimation of power, conflict. Meanwhile they omitted or reduced the visibility of positive experiences of self-direction, self-organization, civil solidarity, creativity, responsibility that the EuroMaidan life-world displayed.

Everything that deviates from the positive picture of the reality is symbolically represented as incompatible with the social experience, although, in fact, the Ukrainian society had already the social experience of violence in the previous historical periods. Historically, such symbols as the symbol-product "blood" or the symbol-concept "despot" are, actually, compatible with the actual experience because they were the part of the preceding social experience.

However, due to the media symbolic representations they are intrinsically incompatible with this social experience.

Finally, I arrived at the definition of the dominant symbolic representations in the media coverage of the EuroMaidan life-world. This operation could be compared with the definition of narratives that are the themes of the descriptions of participants' experiences in phenomenological analysis. The biggest number of symbols in all three countries under study were grouped around the symbolic representation "struggle against dictatorship".

Key words

Symbol, symbolic representation, symbolic form, conception, concept, universality, ideality, life-world, experience, meaning, protest, EuroMaidan, culture, media, tabloid, quality weekly, visibility, spatiality, temporality, numbering, power, violence, conflict.

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