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MANIPULATION OF THE TRANSFER OF INFORMATION ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE ACTIVITIES OF POLISH LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

MANIPULACJA PRZEKAZEM INFORMACJI NA PRZYKŁADZIE DZIAŁANIA POLSKICH ORGANÓW ŚCIGANIA

Summary: Manipulation as a way of influencing a person has a negative connotation due to the techniques and methods of influence used, as well as instrumentalism in the manipulator's relationship with the person subjected to manipulation. This also applies to the manipulation of information. Nevertheless, in terms of investigations and actions taken by law enforcement agencies, information manipulation gains a new dimension, as it often leads to the disclosure of the truth and detection of the perpetrator of the crime. In addition, the manipulation of information is used in the mass media and serves to calm the public and restore public order. The purpose of this article is to present information manipulation as one of the ways in which law enforcement agencies operate. The approach to the above topic requires first defining what manipulation is, and then characterizing the tasks and specificity of the activities of law enforcement agencies. The essence of the article includes a description of the use of information manipulation in the work of, inter alia, services such as the police and the prosecutor's office, along with an analysis of the rightness of such actions and the presentation of the above case on selected examples. The research problem raised in the study concerned the use of information by law enforcement services to manipulate the message in order to obtain benefits related to the investigation. It was found that the deliberate manipulation of information by the Polish law enforcement authorities allows to obtain tangible benefits in the form of obtaining information about the perpetrators of crimes, the circumstances of their commission, as well as the detection of motives that led to the commission

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of the crime. An important aspect of information manipulation by Polish law enforcement agencies is the possibility of reassuring the public opinion by making available only such information that will not arouse panic and social unrest.

Keywords: information, manipulation, law enforcement, Machiavellianism

Streszczenie: Manipulacja jako sposób oddziaływania na człowieka ma wydźwięk negatywny z racji wykorzystywanych technik i sposobów oddziaływania oraz instrumentalizmu w relacji manipulatora z osobą poddawaną manipulacji. Dotyczy to również manipulacji informacją. Niemniej jednak w aspekcie prowadzonych dochodzeń i działań podejmowanych przez organy ścigania manipulacja informacją zyskuje nowy wymiar, ponieważ nierzadko prowadzi do ujawnienia prawdy i wykrycia sprawcy przestępstwa. Poza tym manipulacja informacją wykorzystywana jest w środkach masowego przekazu i służy uspokojeniu opinii publicznej oraz przywróceniu ładu publicznego. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest przedstawienie manipulacji informacją jako jednego ze sposobów działania organów ścigania. Podejście do powyższego tematu w pierwszej kolejności wymaga zdefiniowania, czym jest manipulacja, po czym scharakteryzowania zadań oraz specyfiki działania organów ścigania. W meritum artykułu zawarty jest opis zastosowania manipulacji informacją w pracy między innymi takich służb jak policja i prokuratura, wraz z analizą słuszności podejmowania takich działań oraz ukazaniem powyższej sprawy na wybranych przykładach. Poruszony w opracowaniu problem badawczy dotyczył wykorzystania informacji przez służby organów ścigania do manipulowania przekazem w celu uzyskania korzyści związanych z prowadzonym dochodzeniem. Ustalono, że wykorzystana w sposób celowy manipulacja informacją przez polskie organy ścigania pozwala uzyskiwać wymierne korzyści w postaci zdobywania informacji o sprawcach przestępstw, okolicznościach ich popełnienia, a także wykrycia motywów, które skłoniły do popełnienia przestępstwa. Ważnym aspektem manipulowania informacją przez polskie organy ścigania jest możliwość uspokojenia opinii publicznej poprzez udostępnianie tylko takich informacji, które nie będą wzbudzały paniki i niepokoju społecznego.

Słowa kluczowe: informacja, manipulacja, organy ścigania, makiawelizm

INTRODUCTION

A well-known Polish literary critic, Karol Irzykowski said, "Honesty is a virtue that costs a person a lot."¹ These words were spoken at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, and they seem to be so relevant in the 21st century. Today's society seems to live far from honesty, which also derives from truth. Man creates a reality for himself to achieve commodum². This commodum sets the goal of the action. Achieving benefits takes priority over honesty or truth. 21st century societies are strictly consumer, where they are focused on income, profits, which has become one of the priorities of human life. The pursuit of benefits is noticeable in an individual

¹ S. Panek, *Mosty Karola Irzykowskiego*, Poznań 2019, s. 18.

² Translation from Latin: advantage.

dimension, but also in a wider plane, i.e. in the functioning of many organizations and societies.

It is worth emphasizing here that in the times of digitization and the rapid development of technology, information becomes a certain benefit, a desired good. It has the power to create reality. Very often, it is not the facts that have arisen and are strongly rooted in the real world that create reality, but the information provided about the above facts, including interpretation, evaluation, description. Man's perception of the world and acting in this world depends on its understanding, and understanding is based on the received and processed data and information. Therefore, the transfer of information is extremely important. As the practice of everyday life shows, the use of information in personal and professional life and in the further social context takes place in order to achieve certain goals, understood as benefits.

The presented article shows how law enforcement agencies achieve the desired benefits through the transfer of information and what these benefits are. This is the main research problem of this study. Along with the transfer of information, the manipulation of this information, another important concept appears, which, apart from theoretical studies, has also become deeply rooted in practice – it is manipulation. The issue of manipulation, the functioning of law enforcement agencies and the handling of information transfer using manipulation is discussed in detail below in this article.

MANIPULATION AND LAW ENFORCEMENT IN THE LIGHT OF LITERATURE AND LEGAL REGULATIONS

The term “manipulation” is derived from Latin, etymologically it comes from the noun *manus*, which in translation into Polish means “hand”. Analyzing the meaning of the above, it is noticed that manipulation is commonly understood as controlling someone like a puppet, which is also defined by the saying “hold someone in your hand”.

According to the PWN Encyclopedia, the concept of manipulation can be understood in two ways. First, manipulation is defined as “one of the techniques of exercising power,”³ and secondly, as gaining the trust of the individual to gain control over him, the purpose of which is to implement his own plans⁴. The above-mentioned definition therefore links manipulation with the exercise of power. A person who wishes to exercise power influences others in such a way that they are subject to the ruler. Although this influence is ethically controversial, as it is not based on the direct transfer of views and does not encourage someone to choose a ruler, the techniques of influence raise ethical problems. Usually, in the process of manipulation, techniques and methods of influence are used, which are aimed at the target,

³ <https://encyklopedia.pwn.pl/haslo/manipulacja;3937257.html> [access: 30.09.2021].

⁴ *Ibidem* [access: 30.09.2021].

in favor of the manipulator, and do not reflect or pay little attention to the person being manipulated. It is noticed that the goal of the activity is the priority and the recipient of the activity is relegated to the background.

The concept of manipulation has been elaborated by many theorists from various fields of science. However, attention is always paid to this type of behavior, where the manipulated person is influenced with the use of ethically questionable methods, techniques and tools. One of the theorists of the phenomenon defines the concept of manipulation as follows: "it is an action of one person or a group of people (institutions), which is addressed to others, as a result of which others unknowingly pursue goals conceived and intended by manipulators. Manipulation is then steering another person who is not aware of its instrumentality"⁵. This definition is adopted for the purposes of this article as accurate, coherent and comprehensive. The definition indicates the basic features contained in the concept of manipulation.

Manipulation is an interaction. It can be a longer process or a one-time activity, although it is always the influence of the manipulating person on the person being manipulated. The idea behind the action is important, namely exerting influence so that the manipulated people act in the manner indicated by the manipulators. In the manipulation activity, the manipulating person strictly determines the goals of the undertaken activity and then selects the techniques, methods of proceeding or the type of communication appropriately to the above-defined, specific goals. The next two equally important elements of the characteristics of the concept of manipulation are "control" and the subject's lack of awareness that he is being controlled. The manipulated subject seems to lose its subjectivity because, according to the above definition, it is treated instrumentally, i.e. as an instrument, i.e. an object, not a subject. Such setting a goal above a human, and objectification of the manipulated person would seem to induce to evaluate manipulation definitely pejoratively. Meanwhile, the following considerations around the use of manipulation by law enforcement agencies will refute the above theory, indicating that manipulation should not typically be considered on a zero - one scale, which will be discussed in more detail later in this article.

When characterizing the concept of manipulation, it should also be emphasized that manipulation is created by: a manipulating person, the so-called manipulator, which influences the manipulated person, subjected to manipulation and techniques, methods, manners of the manipulator, aimed at a specific goal, as well as communication, information, data that they are used in manipulation. These above elements must exist in order to be able to talk about manipulation. The manipulator, just like the manipulated person, does not have to be specific individuals, but certain groups, e.g. institutions, organizations or law enforcement agencies, which is discussed in this article.

⁵ A. Zwoliński, *Sekty... Dlaczego?*, Warszawa 1998, pp. 122-123.

Law enforcement agencies are another concept that requires clarification. In the Republic of Poland, the prosecution authority is, inter alia, the Prosecutor's Office, which operates with the help of uniformed services (also in accordance with Polish criminal regulations – law enforcement agencies), the basis of which is the Police⁶. Legal literature indicates that a law enforcement authority is a separate unit that has specific competences and appropriate measures to implement the will of the state in the scope of applicable law⁷, where the following legal authorization is indicated in relation to law enforcement agencies: Act of 28 January 2016 Law on the prosecutor's office⁸, the Act of April 6, 1990 on the Police⁹, the Act of June 6, 1997. Criminal Code and others¹⁰.

Law enforcement agencies perform tasks in the field of prosecuting crimes, conduct criminal proceedings, they collect evidence, take care of order and safety. These are just a few functions of the law enforcement agencies, which have been treated quite vaguely as they are not the subject of this article. Art. 2 of the Law on the Public Prosecutor's Office indicates that: "The public prosecutor's office performs tasks in the area of prosecuting crimes and upholds the rule of law"¹¹. While Art. 1 of the Police Act indicates that the task of the Police is to protect the safety of people and to maintain public safety and order¹². Apart from these basic functions mentioned above, it should also be pointed out for the purposes of this article that the Public Prosecutor's Office also coordinates the process of combating various negative phenomena¹³. This function of the prosecution will be discussed below in connection with considerations regarding the use of manipulation by law enforcement agencies.

It is also worth emphasizing here that due to the fact that law enforcement agencies fulfill the will of the state, their rank in the country is quite high. Public opinion observes cases conducted by law enforcement agencies, especially in the dimension of events that are particularly touching, such as: the case of Tomasz Komenda, who was innocently convicted of rape, who spent 18 years in prison for an act that he did not commit; or the case of a mother-child-killer from a small village in the Lubelskie Voivodeship, who gave birth to more children, then killed newborns and hid them in barrels; or the case of Ewa Tylman – a young woman whose corpse was emerged from the river and despite the assumptions about the perpetrator, nothing was proven to anyone; or the case of 4-year-old Michałek drowned in the Vistula by his mother's co-

⁶ <https://zpe.gov.pl/a/organy-scigania/D18EmdjZP> [access: 1.10.2021].

⁷ F. Prusak, *Systematyzacja kompetencyjna organów ścigania karnego*, „Studia Prawnicze i Administracyjne” 2012, no. 1(3), p. 16.

⁸ Look: Act of January 28, 2018 - Law on the public prosecutor's office (Journal of Laws of 2016, item 117).

⁹ Look: Act of April 6, 1990 on the Police (Journal of Laws of 1990, No. 30, item 179).

¹⁰ Look: Act of June 6, 1997 Penal Code (Journal of Laws of 1997, No. 88, item 553).

¹¹ Art. 2 of the Act of January 28, 2018 - Law on the public prosecutor's office ((Journal of Laws of 2016, item 117).

¹² Look: Art. 1 of the Act of April 6, 1990 on the Police (Journal of Laws of 1990, No. 30, item 179).

¹³ J. Onyszczyk, K. Kwiatkowska, *Rola i miejsca prokuratury w systemie organów demokratycznego państwa prawnego w nowej ustawie o prokuraturze*, Warszawa 2019, p. 9.

habitant. There are many more things of this type. The fact that the public is interested in this type of legal and forensic matters indicates that, on the one hand, the public seeks information, and on the other hand, the law enforcement agencies themselves provide the public with information on media-interesting cases through the media. In a given message, elements of manipulation techniques can also be indicated, which will be discussed later in the article. The institution responsible for the transmission of information from law enforcement agencies to the public is the Press Office¹⁴. A press spokesman (press officer) is responsible for contact with the media, providing information and creating a media image, acting within the police press services¹⁵.

USE OF MANIPULATION BY LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

The above analyzes made it possible to understand the essence of manipulation as well as the functions and tasks of law enforcement agencies. Manipulation seems to be a phenomenon that should be assessed negatively. The practice of everyday life shows that this seemingly negative phenomenon is commonly used in the work of law enforcement agencies, which is related to the manipulation of information transfer. Manipulating the transfer of information has become one of the ways in which law enforcement agencies operate, and the issue of ethical assessment of this manipulation will be considered later in this article.

It should be indicated what are the ways of manipulating information by law enforcement agencies, in the context of the above considerations concerning the characteristics of the concept of manipulation and the functions performed by law enforcement agencies.

Firstly, attention is drawn to the fact that law enforcement agencies, through press spokesmen, provide the public with information on matters of interest to the media, as mentioned earlier. While the case is still pending and the proceedings are pending, the information provided to the media must be properly selected so as not to disturb the course of the proceedings. Sometimes it is necessary to present information that is not true, in addition to information about true, dry facts. For example, in a given area there are other crimes committed by one person, e.g. a serial killer. The case is pending. The person responsible for the killings is wanted. The public, driven by a feeling of fear and threat, begins to panic about the fact that the criminal has not yet been arrested. Panic causes chaos and, at the same time, makes it difficult to investigate. Then it seems justified to convey as a message to the public that a suspect has been selected who is to be detained soon. Such action includes the features of manipulation. Law enforcement agencies are a manipulator that sends a specific message to a wider

¹⁴ Look: <https://policja.pl/pol/kontakt/rzecznik/734,Zespol-Prasowy-Komendy-Glownej-Policji.html> [access: 1.10.2021], <https://pk.gov.pl/kontakt/rzecznik-prasowy-2/rzecznik-prasowy/> [access: 1.10.2021].

¹⁵ Look: *Głos Policji*, „Gazeta Policyjna”, No. 98/may 2013.

audience, i.e. the public. This message is not true, although the goal is to influence the manipulated in such a way as to reduce the emerging panic and calm public mood, thus restoring trust in law enforcement agencies and social order.

It is difficult to unequivocally assess the presented method of manipulating information by law enforcement agencies. The analysis of the above could be done on the basis of the basic principle of Machiavellianism that "the end justifies the means"¹⁶. There will be a long debate in the literature as to whether or not Machiavelli was right. The author is ready to accept the statement that the end justifies the means only when it has a positive value higher than the negative value of the means we use to achieve the goal. Therefore, in relation to the example discussed above – the means is a lie expressed in a manipulative message, so in itself it seems to be something wrong. However, the goal is a certain common good, understood in this example in two ways – first as calming public opinion, reducing panic, and secondly as not disturbing the organization of the investigation. Putting the middle and the goal at stake, it seems that the goal has a greater positive value than the middle – a negative value. Therefore, it is impossible to disagree with Niccolo Machiavelli that "the end justifies the means." Following the above line of reasoning, it is noted that in the discussed example, the manipulation of information transfer as one of the methods of operation of law enforcement agencies seems to be a justified phenomenon, necessary in a given situation. At this point, a number of ethical controversies may arise, namely, to what extent a consciously transmitted lie can be justified in terms of the purpose of its use. At this point, the author of the article supports Machiavelli's theory due to the effects of action, the more so as the legal and forensic sphere is a specific sphere of human activity, where human life and the safety of an individual, entire societies and the state are protected. Therefore, the maxim "the end justifies the means" seems to be justified.

With reference to the above-mentioned function of the Public Prosecutor's Office as the coordinator of the process aimed at combating various negative phenomena, it should be noted that here, information manipulation is also used as a way of work of law enforcement agencies. Namely, in addition to preventive programs, the transfer of information is also used, which is not always true, but is aimed at eliminating negative phenomena. Such a phenomenon may be the aforementioned panic in society, but also e.g. drugs and other intoxicants. For example, a report is made to the media on the side effects of using a given psychoactive substance, and the report exaggerates these effects. The aim of such activities is to discourage society from using given psychoactive substances.

¹⁶ Machiavellianism is one of the political doctrines named after its creator, Niccolo Machiavelli. Machiavellianism assumes that the most important reason is the reason of the state, which can be achieved with all available methods and means, because only the goal, that is the effect of an action, matters, not the way to achieve this goal.

Law enforcement authorities they also manipulate information not only in relation to their relations with the public opinion, but also in the course of conducted proceedings in relation to suspects or witnesses of events. During the interrogations, suspects are given a number of false information, which is aimed at, for example, obtaining certain facts from them or admitting guilt. For example, one of the suspects is informed that his accomplice friend confessed to everything and said who and to what extent is guilty of the act. The information provided is not true and is intended to force the suspect to tell the truth or break the silence. This example illustrates another situation in which law enforcement agencies manipulate the transmission of information. It seems that such a procedure is also justified, as it may bring tangible benefits. This method of work and interrogation has been used by law enforcement agencies for years. However, one dangerous procedure should be pointed out here, where the line is very fragile between the safe and justified manipulation of information during the interrogation of suspects and stalemate situations when it comes to extorting statements aimed at imposing an indictment, and it is irrelevant whether a given person is guilty or not. Extortion of testimony is definitely unacceptable in the work of law enforcement agencies. Another thing is such intelligent manipulation of information during interrogations that the suspect, analyzing the information provided and recognizing it as true, tells the truth himself, admitting to having committed the acts. Whereas such manipulation of information is something else, where the victim is intimidated and ordered to admit to certain acts, because the need is guilty, and not the discovery of the truth. The manipulation of information is justified by the purpose. If the goal is truth, then information manipulation is positively assessed by law enforcement agencies, but if this action is driven by other, less glorious motives, then this action cannot be considered right.

The practice of everyday life indicates cases where police officers significantly exceeded their powers during questioning, where the aim was not to find out the truth but to create the guilty party. In the case of Tomasz Komenda, during the brutal interrogations, the young man was forced to confess to committing an act that he did not truthfully commit. In addition to manipulating information and imposing ready-made answers on the accused, physical coercion was also used, which resulted in the fact that the Command confessed to rape with particular cruelty, as a result of which the teenager died. The man spent 18 years in prison, after which the truth saw the light of day and he was acquitted.

An example of information manipulation as a method of work of law enforcement agencies during the questioning of a suspect is the case of Jarosław Sokołowski, pseudonym "Masa". The man was arrested by the police as a high-ranking member of the Pruszków mafia. As a result of interrogations where manipulative techniques were used, Sokołowski confessed to the alleged acts, but in order to avoid a high penalty, he became a crown witness, which eventually led to the closure of many high-ranking gang

members. This case was very positive for the judiciary and law enforcement agencies. It is also an example of the positive application of manipulative techniques in the work of law enforcement agencies. Of course, the framework of this article does not allow for the presentation of all similar cases in which information was manipulated.

Information manipulation by law enforcement agencies is a common and widely used practice. The methods and types of information transmission, as well as the multitude of forms of communication, allow the manipulation process to be used in such a way that it is almost imperceptible. An important role in this practice is played not only by the information, message, recipient or person transmitting it, but also by the mass media, as discussed in the next part of the article.

INFORMATION MANIPULATION BY LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES AND THE MASS MEDIA

It is impossible not to notice that in order for information to be manipulated, the message, the recipient and the source of the message are necessary. Thus, law enforcement agencies provide information to a wider audience, i.e. the public, via the mass media. According to the PWN Encyclopedia, the mass media are “devices and institutions through which content is sent to a very large and diverse audience; press, radio, television, also film (cinema), books (popular), music recordings (CDs, cassettes) and the so-called new media”, among which stands out above all the Internet. In the case of cooperation between law enforcement agencies and the media, the press, radio, television and Internet broadcasting are of particular importance. The Internet is a relatively young tool used to transmit information, but widely used. Law enforcement agencies have their own pages on social networks that are constantly updated. The Internet is a way of transmitting information, but also a way of searching and collecting information.

Law enforcement agencies cooperate with the mass media, because selected information or disinformation messages are transmitted through the institution of the above-mentioned Press Spokesman, which are received by the public. A close correlation is visible here. On the one hand, public opinion demands information on interesting criminal cases, on the other hand, the mass media are looking for topics of interest to the media, and on the part of law enforcement agencies, it is desirable that some information or disinformation messages reach the public, which may help in the course of the proceedings. Sometimes in this correlation there are undesirable situations, where the public receives information that, due to the ongoing investigation, should not reach a wider audience. However, this topic is so complicated and multi-threaded that it could become the topic of the next article.

Mass media have a huge driving force because the appropriate transfer of information to the public affects the increase or decrease of public trust in law enforcement agencies. For example, in March 2021, information appeared in the media that

“The police have cracked down on the fuel mafia. 22 people detained, a huge operation of the services”. This type of information increases public confidence in police officers. Public opinion and society feel safer because they believe in the effectiveness of the Polish police and see the results of these activities. Meanwhile, articles like “Łębork. The court sentenced former policemen to prison for taking bribes. The verdict is not final” they make the public lose confidence in police officers. This issue shows how powerful the mass media is.

SUMMARY

To sum up, manipulation of information in the activities of law enforcement agencies as one of the methods of their operation is a common phenomenon. Despite the pejorative echo of the term manipulation, in relation to the work of law enforcement agencies, this phenomenon is justified and can be assessed positively, however, the positive assessment of information manipulation as a method of law enforcement activities results from the purpose for which this action is taken.

The analysis of specific examples of the use of information manipulation by law enforcement authorities allowed to conclude that it is often possible to indicate the rightness of using this type of influence. Law enforcement agencies use information manipulation both in the process of investigating criminal suspects and in transmitting information to the public in order to avoid panic and to calm public sentiment.

By characterizing manipulation, law enforcement agencies and the relationship between the transmission of information by law enforcement agencies to the public and the public, mass media, and disinformation, the aim of the article was to present manipulation of information as one of the ways in which law enforcement agencies operate.

During the implementation of the goal, it was found that the manipulation of information by Polish law enforcement agencies often has a beneficial effect on the ongoing investigation, because on the one hand it helps to avoid panic and calms the public, and on the other hand it helps to establish the circumstances and detect the perpetrators of crimes.

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