

PURPOSE AND VITALITY OF RUMOURS: POLITICAL ASPECTS

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The article deals with social instrumental intention of rumours and their expression. It also reveals the social and political role of rumours in controlling the behaviour of a group of members and preserving its identity. The dual nature of rumours is analyzed as well as gnosiological, psychological and sociological reasons. On the one hand, the roots of rumour vitality are hidden in the dualism of this phenomenon, where in a strange way contradictory things get on well together - private and public, moral and immoral, the truth and the lie, between which it is not easy to draw a clear boundary even in everyday life. On the other hand, a rumour is alive because of our constant thirst for additional and fresher information, trying to perceive a person, an action or a phenomenon better. At the same time, it stimulates the proclaimers of the official political information to find the ways for the provided information to be more accurate, open, exhaustive as possible, presented in an understandable and accessible form. There the power of the effect of a rumour lays, a phenomenon without authorship, but with an authority to which, more or less, all of us are to obey.

Keywords: rumour, information, communication, politics, social control, mass media, social groups, vitality of rumours.

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Introduction

Rumours are informal information conveyed to other people at the time of interpersonal contact. Interest (hunger) in such information is widely spread. So it is not amazing that rumours are the characteristic features of all cultures and are spread in all layers of various societies. To tell the truth, cultural mentality of any nation, its customs and traditions have influence on the scale of spreading. In spite of that, this phenomenon is distinguished by its universality because it extends to all social groups and professions. Different social groups and separate professions vary in receptivity of rumours but the influence of them is felt by everyone.

It goes without saying, that the influence of a rumour itself can be diverse. It can help some individual, a group, an organization or an institution to achieve a fixed aim, but it also can make harm.

From that point of view, it is possible to look at a rumour as a certain means of fight for achieving one's interests because various concerned groups, business organizations, political parties and other institutions are inclined to make use of it. So it is possible to confirm, that a rumour has got an instrumental purpose fulfilling some social functions. Sometimes it becomes an effective means of control of social

groups and social behaviour of their members, and also the support of a group's identity and stability.

Such eminent West sociologists as A. Ross (1901), F. E. Lumley (1925), E. Durkheim (1964), M. Gluckman (1963), R. Paine (1970) and others have turned their attention to this. For instance, A. Ross, while investigating the peculiarities of contacts in various social groups in the USA, has paid his attention to the influence of rumours on them (Ross 1901). E. Durkheim emphasized the role of rumours on the control of behavior of the members of deviant groups (Durkheim 1964). But the authors mentioned did not consider this problem in detail. In essence, they only listed, while investigating sociologically other social problems. In other words, they looked at it in the context of other investigated problems.

In Lithuania there are not any scientific works concerning this subject. We notice the absence of a more coherent and focused glance at the instrumental purpose of rumours. What is even more important, the instrumental purpose of rumours is not mentioned and shown in a concrete way. We also do not have a more coherent perception and naming of those factors, which give vitality to rumours. We could better perceive the peculiarity of this phenomenon, its receptivity and vitality if we looked on its instrumental purpose deeper and more universally.

The aim of this article is an attempt to describe what the instrumental purpose of rumours and their vitality is.

To achieve this aim, such tasks are raised:

1. to discuss rumours as a group's means of control and peculiarities of its use;
2. to discuss rumours as a means of a social group's protection and assurance of its homogeneity;
3. find out the reasons of rumour vitality and the factors of their spreading.

The method of the research – the critical analysis of scientific literature and sources and also the author's sagacity.

Rumours as a means of social control

As a rumour distinguishes itself by its great penetration and influence, it is natural that it can be successfully used in implementing the social control of the society. In other words, it can become one of an important means of such control. One of the first to take notice of it was a notable American sociologist A. Ross who together with the colleagues F. Giddens and L. Ward issued the magazine of social works "American Journal of Sociology" (1895–1905).

A. Ross based his work on the ideas of H. Spencer, a representative of the organic school. He asserted that a society resembled a biological organism and that the laws of social development were the same as of any living organism. As biological organism has got various organs which function in harmony and fulfil all necessary functions, in the same way in a "social body", that is in society, various groups of people fulfil different social functions and function in harmony; it ensures normal development of the society. In their turn, rumours strongly influence that collaboration and, as informal forms of communication, are especially effective and play an important role in creating and consolidating the social order in the society. In his book "Social Control: a Survey of the Foundations of Order" A. Ross analyzed and persuasively showed, that rumours had a strong influence in forming and consolidating democratic regulations in various spheres of political, economical and social life of the USA in the 19th century (Ross 1901: 89).

Another researcher of this phenomenon F. E. Lumley in his monograph "Means of social control" dedicated a separate and exhaustive chapter to rumours where he discussed the influence of rumours on the control of behavior of deviated group members (Lumley 1925: 211–234).

Today the proposition that rumours fulfil an important function in all primary groups (family, a group of friends) has already become a sociological cliché. However, attention to a

rumour as a means of control of the members' behavior does not diminish. All the more, it is an informal control which is why it is valued as having more than one meaning. There can be no doubt that a rumour is a typical example of informal control. To tell the truth, it fulfils its function best of all in small homogeneous groups or societies. Meanwhile, in developed urban societies moral standards and values are greatly influenced by an institutional formal social control that is why the behavior of individuals is socially more controlled and determined.

By the way, as the social stratification of the society increases at the same time as national, racial, special interests and other foundations, new second-rate groups which try to maintain their autonomy arise. That is especially observed in cities and numerous communities. Namely here a rumour as an informal means of association becomes of a greater importance in comparison with other means of communication (Baumgartner 1984: 89–103), because it fulfils a significant role of social identity and social control. It should be noticed that for a long time in the works of Western researchers a rumour as a performer of the function of a social control has been related to the period of life of the pre-modern society. That, in its turn, encouraged researches in sociology, law and anthropology, seeking to show in what way rumours socially controlled the behavior of people in primitive ethnic groups (Albert 1972).

Though at the time of such researches a lot of facts showing the influence of a rumour on the social control of the members of ethnic groups were established, it is unlikely that in a modern society such control is great. The experience shows, that such a formal means has an increasing influence on the control of individuals' behavior. But it is impossible not to notice that, though a rumour's influence does not so greatly determine an individual's social behavior, however, it is rather real and depends on a great number of factors.

The question arises in what situations and circumstances a rumour can become an effective means of the social control of any individual's behaviour.

Here we can single out several circumstances.

First. *A rumour can be an effective means of the control of behaviour in small deviant groups.* As E. Durkheim (1964: 85–110) notices, namely, there exist standards and values of behaviour, which become binding for all members of a group. An individual who does not observe these standards is excluded from the group. Even more, he becomes "a traitor" and various sanctions can be applied. So it is very important that the information about you is adduced without any interpretations. That requires some efforts not to get "into the third's circle", that is not to form a foundation for spreading rumours about you. So, in a deviant group, a rumour for sure becomes a powerful means of control of its members. (Let us recollect, that sometimes officers of certain institutions use rumours as a means of recruiting criminals for collaboration. It is said: if you do not agree to collaborate, we will spread a rumour about you and so on. In such a way people sometimes accept an offer).

Second. *Spread by a rumour, information which contains a moment of condemnation of an action or activity can by itself stimulate people to change their behaviour.* A person sees that other people disapprove of such an action and estimate it negatively. In such a way he gets a signal about the estimation of a certain action he would have done. An example of a slandered "victim" gives nourishment for consideration and influence decision. So, in a sense, a rumour performs the role of social control and prevention. In other words, knowing how the surrounding people estimate a certain action or activity, giving it a shape of a rumour, induces an individual to behave according to the accepted standards in the group. So, we have some basis to affirm that a rumour is more than the space in which the process of social control

takes place. At the same time that is the space that brings moral preferences of the members of a rumour process to light.

The matter is that a rumour can meet disapproval or can be unaccepted. Such a reaction can spread not only the rumour itself, but also its content which can be valued differently by the receivers of the information. In such a way, additional explanations cannot change anything because people accept things just as they are. For example, if a group estimates some action accordingly, so does a member of the group receiving information. So, a rumour itself (and its content) can bring about an unfavourable point of view by the part of people, who will estimate it through the prism of their own values. Disagreements will come to light when estimating a rumour well only to show moral preferences and their acceptability in the society. In such a way a rumour will perform a part of social control.

Third. *The part of a rumour social control is hidden in that a rumour threatens the spreader by sanctions and does not ensure the possibility of a convenient behavior.* The matter is that when a person becomes a rumour-monger, he cannot be sure of other people's respect. People try to satisfy their curiosity and enjoy unconfidential information about "the third that is not close by". On the other hand, a person feels that such information turning into a rumour is a blameable action. Anxiety of one's reputation, as E. M. Albert observes, is considerably greater than a fear of a rumour (Albert 1972: 87). It is also clear that representatives of different cultures evaluate a rumour in a different way (Lewis 2002). It is natural that it has influence on the affectivity of a rumour and also on a standpoint towards a rumour itself and its spreading.

The American sociologist R. L. Rosnow divides societies (their cultures) into two groups: 1) "Culture of guilt" and 2) "the Culture of shame" (Rosnow 1977: 159–160). The first group is not tolerant of rumour-mongers. The rule is that person's actions, even immoral, can

be discussed only when the person participates. Such a rule is widely spread in Scandinavian countries (Lewis 2002). Meanwhile in the second group, that is "the culture of shame" it is almost a norm to discuss a person's actions in his absence. Such rules are spread in the southern (Roman) countries and Latin America. In its turn, such rules increase strain in society because any person can become a "hero" of a rumour even not knowing about that. In such a way people become sickly suspicious and later paranoid (Gilmore 1978). A paranoid is sure that without any doubt he/she is in the centre of everybody's attention, and that he/she is the "hero" of various imaginary stories.

It is necessary to notice that a rumour itself is not very significant. Its consequences are much more significant because more and more people are involved and those people are not critical. They do not have immunity and rumours make them easy to get injured and defenceless.

From the above mentioned it becomes clear that a rumour performs functions of social control. But that social control is directly connected with the people's preparedness to trust rumours in their everyday life. It is obvious that the process of changing the "culture of shame" to the "culture of fault" is not rapid at having one meaning. Moreover, a rumour does not only control individuals or social groups, it also performs the function of their security.

A rumour as a means of the security of a social group

The place and the role of a social group in the society depend on many things. Every group tries to survive as a stable definite totality which can resist various external influences. Without stability and conservatism any social group is hardly possible. At first glance, it may seem that the rumour paying attention to negative actions of individuals and spreading informal information supported by doubtful sources is able to

induce only destruction. But at the same time a rumour can perform a significant function of the social stability and security of a group.

The first who put such point of view into words was a social anthropologist Max Gluckman (1963) and later he was supported by U. Hannerz (1980), A. Cox (1970: 88–98), R. Paine (1970: 172–188). The proposition that rumours can serve as a factor, justifying the exceptionality of social groups, requires a wider substantiation. M. Gluckman presents three arguments (1963: 20–34).

First. *A rumour does not strengthen the existing universal rules of behavior. It shows the trustworthiness of moral norms and values. In other words, a rumour helps to reveal moral norms and values existing in social groups and shows their trustworthiness in comparison with universal norms.*

The essence is that every rumour has its own audience which accepts or not its orientation towards certain values. For example, a rumour that spreads among the country people is effective as long as it corresponds to their imagination about morals and values. This orientation towards moral standards and values which exist in a social group makes the creators of a rumour to transform it into an acceptable form for a certain social group by accepting that rumour; the members of any social group identify themselves in their own way. So, a rumour helps the members of a social group to perceive themselves as a certain totality, which has a similar comprehension of morals and values. In this way, any social group differs from others, and a rumour helps it to perceive itself as a stable unit.

Second. *A rumour defines people participating in it as a group, the members of which must observe certain rules of behavior. These rules help to identify them as members of a rumour's group.*

The matter is that a rumour by its essence is orientated towards a certain group of people where they communicate and spread information “about the third” in his/her absence “but

only between us”. In other words, a rumour defines a group which is provided with information. The right to participate in a rumour is a sign of friendship and acknowledgement, because a rumour is spread only among reliable people. In their turn people participating in a rumour also undertake certain obligations and observe rules of behavior. The violation of them means the violation of the norms of the group. That also means condemnation and exclusion from the rumour space.

The fear of being excluded from the rumour space stimulates to observe the accepted norms and values of behavior in the group. In the correct sense of the word, a rumour becomes the means helping to identify morals and values of a group. As various social groups constantly spread rumours, a rumour helps to identify these groups better to establish moral priorities and values which are revealed by rumours. It can be said: a rumour is like a sponge which absorbs everybody who is receptive for a certain rumour and whose moral norms and values are close. In this meaning a rumour is very important for rallying social groups of individuals. *A rumour is constantly on duty.* That means that people will constantly try to look for some informal information to satisfy their curiosity. It means that possibilities to hide information diminish. From that point of view a rumour and the people spreading it constantly revive and strengthen a social system.

Third. *The information concentrated in a rumour, decreases the tension and the rise of conflicts, because a rumour insists on observing certain rules of behaviours. So we can suspect that a rumour performing an inner rehabilitation of relations of the group at the same time helps the group to remain as an integrated totality.*

It is necessary to notice that M. Gluckman's proposition (a rumour helps to maintain and stabilize social groups) can be accepted only in such a way that all members of the group more or less acknowledge values and moral norms of the group. Otherwise a rumour can induce disintegration of the group. Consequently, groups

are not unanimous – they can be formed by individuals of various moral “quality”.

So, there the problem of a group’s “quality” comes to the surface. The essence is that groups cannot only be of various quantities. Their members are more or less free to join or leave. It is natural that such groups cannot influence the society very much. So groups which are not accidental have better possibilities. A social group consists of people cherishing certain ideals, values and moral regulations. So, this is an exclusive group of people. Such groups can be, for example, lawyers, doctors and so on. These groups are of high rank in the society (they are acknowledged as significant) and cannot let in careerists (persons of great ambitions), as it happens in accidental groups. Besides, as a well-organized group it can strive for an exceptional status.

According to M. Gluckman, the main function of a rumour in such groups is to show indirectly the disapproval of the behavior, which contradicts the moral values and regulations of a group. In other words, a rumour spreading among the members of a group is a peculiar “leaf of litmus” which shows the group members’ attitude to it; that is indirectly examines their morals. Only those who successfully pass that test are allowed to join the group. Such point of view is doubtful.

Here we must remember that the main aim for the rumour spreaders is not to discover the essence of the behavior or to estimate that behavior morally, because it could reveal the motive of a rumour and that might block the way for further interpretations. Besides, there will be discovered the source of a rumour but that contradicts the logic of rumours spreading and its function is not only to condemn but also to cause people to take interest and to induce for finding “the truth”. On the other hand, every member of the group looks at a rumour with his own eyes, through his own prism. In such a way, a member of the group meets with a problem: to accept a rumour according to the moral standards of the group or according to his own

standards. It depends only on his personal decision whether he will be admitted into the group or not. So the decision is for the individual.

It is obvious that rumour information is also influenced by the group. A provider of a rumour cannot ignore socio-psychological orientations, the behavior and manners of association of the group. This also influences rumour content and the form of presentation.

It is also impossible to lessen officially existing standards of morals in the society, i.e. society’s intolerance of immoral occurrences and the practice and traditions of their disapproval. That has only one meaning: actions mentioned in the rumour information and their interpretation cannot exceed certain limits of ethics, because then provider of a rumour risks to lose the reputation of a moral person and at the same time the receiver of rumour risks to lose his confidence in the source. So it is possible to affirm that rumour information is governed in such a sense that it is influenced by the factors of three types. Not only the interests of rumour participants (as Robert Paine (1970: 172–178) affirms), which show egoistic aspirations of the individual, influence the rumour content, nature and the form of presentation but also “the group, the provider of the rumour belongs to socio-psychological characteristics and after all, the society’s moral intolerance of deviant behaviour and values depend on every of the above mentioned factors and can seem to be of great importance in governing rumour information. But in fact only all three factors together create preconditions for governing rumour information. Unfortunately, only theoretical ones.

The essence is that a rumour is a too dynamic and controversial phenomenon. That is a peculiar place where at the same time different social elements meet, interact and neutralize themselves in the field of informal communication. They melt in order to revive unexpectedly and propose to us another secret to be revealed. Namely, it marks out a rumour by a sign of contradictory dualism that gives it the force of inexhaustible vitality.

Reasons of rumour vitality and factors of its spreading

Every participant of a rumour (provider - receiver) at the time of reciprocity feels the ambiguity of his/her status and a certain discomfort. That is because of a rumour nature in which in a strange way contrary things get on well:

- Besides the exact information, on which a rumour is based, there can be found untrustworthy and obscure information.
- The exact information can be misrepresented on presented inaccurately.
- Obscenity can be mixed with decency.
- The indignation at infringements is followed by pliability and persiflage.
- Disgust unites with mercy, disapproval - with a pliant comprehension.
- The doubtful moral foundation of information is covered by the mantle of innocence.
- Sincerity is mixed with sarcasm.

So a rumour constantly keeps its balance to a certain limit. If the limit is not overstepped, there is no rumour. This contradictory and dual quality of a rumour has its own reasons. They are: 1) gnosiological, 2) psychological and 3) sociological.

Gnosiological reasons. The matter is that cognition is a constant process during which new information from various sources occurs. If the information is not corroborated, it does not mean that it is doubtful and because of that it is rejected. It may be that today it is impossible to verify the information because of certain objective reasons. But that does not mean that it will be impossible to verify it in the future. The cognition is a process of “elucidation”, “husking” on the way towards the truth. The unverified information also talks about a phenomenon, action, deed, which we want to understand.

A rumour, presenting unverified information stimulates us to do that faster and to estimate our achievements more critically, especially if the truth is not a result but a process

(a way towards it). All kind of information has a right to live. In its turn, information enables better comprehension of the phenomenon. Thus rumours, according to T. Shibutani, “become inseparable from the formal communication and are considered as informal “reliable” addition to take obtained news” (Shibutani 1966: 48). On the other hand, there is a part of truth in all unverified information. So, a rumour contains a particle of truth in itself. If a rumour is not rejected, it means that it contains that particle of the truth. That is the truth of a rumour. It is known that the trust of a rumour is not concrete, very obscure, not affirming or denying, but only telling, showing and not requiring to be accepted. May be because of that it may seem not so dangerous. But, namely, in its weakness its magic strength is hidden. It not only attracts our attention; it also concentrates our efforts on finding new and more reasonable answers to various questions.

Psychological reasons. In everyday life people not only learn from each other, but also accumulate a lot of information. They would like to share it, but then it would be necessary to present confidential and sometimes even indelicate information, and that could be meddling into private affairs of a person. The truth is that the informal information sometimes is all passed by mimic, gestures, intonation and so on. But not verbally. We find out a lot of intimate things about our friends and acquaintances. If we announced it in public, we could fall into disgrace.

Let's investigate an example of spreading such tactless information. Suppose, a certain Jonas has interesting information about his good friend Petras, who is at present unemployed, but goes to exclusive shops and buys expensive things. Jonas passes that information to Tomas. What information did he pass about his friend? And what possibilities open for Tom when he thinks over that information?

At first sight it seems that the information about another person's matters, passed by a friend, is good. Friendship always rests on

confidence. But the passing of private information is a breach in the confidence and, in its essence a tactless action, in spite of all circumstances. (Why should Jonas be worried about the shops where Petras does the shopping and what expensive things he buys there being unemployed? That is Petras' private matter.) However, Jonas is very much worried about that. Moreover, he passes that information to Tomas. How can we explain that?

It is possible to explain this psychological phenomenon basing ourselves on a supposition that there are very few people who while associating with others would not like to reveal more private information about their friends. In other words, a human nature contains in itself an unbearable wish to share information about other people.

It is possible to say that every person has his/her own secrets and tries to hide them. Simultaneously, every person has a strong wish to find out a secret – especially about other people. “The hunting for secrets” always makes people friends, but temporary. A rumour, presenting information, satisfies a human curiosity – it “reveals” a secret. In such a way people, participating in a rumour, become friends. At the same time, as N. Smelser remarks, rumours “give importance to the situation which people do not understand and help them to prepare for taking actions” (Смелсер 1994: 406).

But let's go back to the example mentioned above. What alternatives are open for Tomas in this situation? It is natural that he will try to find out more information about Petras. So, he will try to associate with Petras' neighbours, friends. In such a way he will get more additional information which he will like to share with others. Of course, he will add something. So, he will spread his own “truth” and evaluation. Namely here is hidden the paradox of a rumour: the aim of a rumour is to present all “truth”, but this truth, perpetually fed by extra “sagacity” of the spreaders, will never be revealed for sure.

Sociological reasons. They are related with the circumstance that information can be the

reason for the occurrence of a rumour. It is not important if it is the information of a common nature or of private matters. Information of both types can become the foundation for a rumour and can “feed” it successfully.

The first reason. *The information passed on always contains elements which can become a pretext for a rumour (can feed it).*

The matter is that there exists a universal phenomenon: while associating people are inevitably inclined to slander about persons who are not near. In such a way it is possible to avoid confrontation. When there is no possibility to verify the information which is presented about the third person, an interlocutor is made to accept it and any negative information, though (as he feels himself) it is not a good thing ethically. The well-known principle “*De mortuis nihil nisi absens*” (we must speak well or nothing about the dead) insists that, on the one hand, the provided information should concern only the person who is near (so he could affirm or deny it); on the other hand, it obligates in the absence of the third person to speak of him only well and all his private matters cannot be the subject of the conversation.

But reality is that everyday association can only be continued if it is fed by “secrets”. Such a secret can become more or less a significant detail of some person's deed or action, which is presented by an interlocutor. So, the information always contains details which can become the basis of a rumour.

The second reason. *Tactless information about other people's private matters.* It has a decisive meaning for a rumour's appearance in a paradox way. The essence is that friendship and cognitive relations insist on the confidence of the partners of the conversation. You can only demonstrate that confidence in case you disclose confidential information about “the third person” to a friend. In such a way, the possession of confidential information (everybody has it) encourages an interlocutor to share it at the time of a conversation and show their own friendliness and confidence.

Everyone, who has information about another person's private matters, must be very careful while associating with other people, because it can appear, that "the third person" is their friend. The understanding of honour and the rules of moral behavior obligate not to publish such information.

On the other hand, everyone, who disposes such confidential information, is obliged to be loyal to his interlocutor and not to hide the information. In such a situation he inevitably will become publisher of the information and so he will "feed" a rumour – he will become a godfather of a rumour (Klapp 1978: 32). When a creator of a rumour publishes confidential information, it is a tactless action. When he refuses to publish that information to everybody but only his friends and well-known acquaintances, having their obligation to use it carefully and wisely, only then his action can be called discreet.

So, a rumour can be called a discreet social form of tactlessness. This form is very dynamic and contradictory in its nature. A rumour at the same time is discreet and common in showing respect to everyone separately. In other words, a rumour creator can reveal a secret, but only as much as the interlocutors or friends will show initiative to know about it and thus, a new secret will be created.

If we want to grasp the essence of this proposition better, we must remember a locution which is often used in everyday life – "to reveal a secret". Sometimes it is simply asked: "Do you want me to reveal a secret to you?" But the real question is: "Do you really want to know that..." In other words, you are ready to accept the information which in its essence is tactless, because it concerns persons who are absent and their actions. But if you want I will tell you. So the question in its essence is discreet, though the action – the spreading of private information – is tactless.

On the other hand, here we can perceive a rumour creator's anxiety about the fate of his "rumour product". The matter is that a rumour's

creator always faces the dilemma – how long it is possible to retain the information. It may happen that the information will become obsolete and worthless in the market of rumours service. So the chance will be lost. Every rumour has such a chance to be noticed and accepted.

But how is it possible not to miss that chance? In other words, when is it the right time to put a rumour into circulation? We do not have the only correct answer. Evidently, such an answer does not exist. That is due to the rumour nature and its discrepancy. So the creator of a rumour can rely only upon his presentation. Very often it does not deceive. But not always.

In spite of that, the intuition always says, that a rumour is expected and desirable. It works well in every stratum of the society though forms and ways of its presentation vary.

So it performs its main mission - satisfies one of our unsatisfied wishes, a wish for a secret and its publishing. Not without a reason in popular literature a rumour is called "a balsam for a soul longing for a secret", a secret which you want to find out in spite of all prohibitions and moral scruples. A rumour helps to get that tactless information in a discreet form. This rumour becomes powerful: from now on there is no secret dedicated "only to you". But at the same time a rumour remains a necessary means of informal interpersonal communication performing an important social function to present tactless information in a discreet form.

The truth is that not everyone is inclined to be tolerant of this form. There is no lack of efforts to control the spreading of the informal information. It is neither surprising nor new. As a rumour has a great influence and its effects are heavily forecast, it is natural that a rumour is a great puzzle for every government which constantly tries to control the presentation and spread of the information.

The idea of controlling a rumour also has deep roots. In various countries efforts to introduce negative sanctions against the spreading of rumours are shown periodically. Even fully totalitarian regimes proved to be helpless

against the spread of rumours. Let's remember the Soviet Union where rumours were widely spread even in the severe time of Stalin's repressions.

On the other hand, there exist a lot of means enabling to decrease considerably the scale of rumours circulation in the society. Here are some of them:

- Efforts to decrease people's feelings of anxiety and uncertainty to foresee (predict) the future, stimulating confidence in themselves and their state.
- The provision wider and more exhaustive information to all the members of the society and also the diminution of the obstacles to pass the information through all channels.
- Frankness and justice, prohibition to distort the facts on behalf of a short-lived benefit.

However, as experience shows, these means are not very effective. In other words, efforts to eliminate the rumour vitality have not given the anticipated results.

So, here we have a well-based question: what factors maintain the spread of rumours and where are the roots of their vitality?

First. *We can guess that the roots of vitality of that phenomenon are hidden in its duality.* We have said that a rumour contains some contrary things at the same time – private and public, moral and immoral, truth and a lie. It is not so simple to draw a clear line in life as well. Because of that, a rumour may be so attractive that it does not have distinct boundaries and everything that is valuable and real in it is so difficult to distinguish.

It is possible to say like this: a rumour does not have its own face (it is multi-faced), and that is why it is unutterable. Being abstract, at the same time it provokes curiosity, anxiety and fear and in the end takes possession of us. Not without any reason, they say, the best manager is the one who does not have a face. A rumour is exactly like this.

In life we have a lot of dosed and exaggerated information as in the case with a rumour. Having that in mind we can say that a rumour is our life in the form of a caricature. A creator of a rumour as a good caricaturist, who tries to reveal the essence of the event in his own way, selects the details and presents them divided into doses. In such a way he "starts" us, arouses our imagination and frankness for interpretations. A caricature, similarly to a created rumour, lives its own life. And in the long run it sometimes becomes more realistic than reality itself.

However, in the case of a caricature we can determine the author. In the case of a rumour we are not able to do that. A rumour has authority but does not have the author. All of us obey that authority. Some of us do more and others less. But we all are children and pupils of the rumour.

Second. *A rumour is constantly maintained by our thirst for some additional information, trying to perceive the phenomenon thoroughly.* The matter is that accepting the information we use "the principle of two keys". The official information, obtained from official sources, always raises certain doubts, because the creators of the information, presenting it in public, have their own interests and aims. The difference and the mistrust between the state institutions and the citizens always was, is and will be. And there will always be some aspiration to get some "additional" information about the received information; in other words, to use "both keys" for clearing up the information.

Here, a question arises: can we resist that and behave in a different way? Suppose, we will try to associate with other people without saying, seeing or hearing more, in other words, without accepting any information that is spreading around us if it is not officially confirmed. It is hardly possible living among people. While associating with people we get information from them with all "extra addition". The paradox is that it is impossible not to accept the information, to forget it or simply

cross it out of memory. The information never disappears – it lives among us and in us. Nothing will help – we cannot throw it out from ourselves.

In other words, if we are not active in a rumour game, it does not mean that we are safe. We can easily become the object of a rumour, in spite of our wishes. So we can say that a rumour is an inseparable part of our communication and social being in society. There are no rumours without us, without rumours we do not exist as individuals are able to understand complex things with the help of rumours. Also we are not able to dispose the information which helps us achieve our aims, the information which helps us feel significant in the field of communication. To feel that we are not only interpreters but creators as well. It helps us to understand the surrounding world and to pass it to others. So it helps to live and survive.

Conclusions

The social role of the rumours controlling the behavior of group members and protecting their identity is expressed in the following way:

- A rumour helps to reveal prevailing values and moral norms in social groups and also helps to disclose their reliability in comparison with universal norms.
- A rumour defines the participants as a group that is obliged to follow certain rules of behavior. It helps them to identify themselves as the members of a group.
- The information of a rumour that is accepted by the members of a group lessens the strain and the rise of conflicts, because a rumour insists on keeping certain rules of behavior. At the same time it helps the group to survive as an integrated totality.

Every member of a group looks at a rumour according to his prism of seeing. That means

that every individual can accept a rumour not the same way as the group does. There occurs a problem for a member of a group: what moral standards to use when accepting a rumour. The decision is upon the individual. He/she gets and passes the information as an individual but not as a member of the group. That is why his/her information contains his/her personal interests. So, we can suppose that the information of the rumour is controlled by the factors of three types. It is influenced by the interests of a rumour and also by “the group” the provider of a rumour belongs to. The socio-psychological characteristics and in the end the society’s moral intolerance of a deviant behavior and values are of great importance. Each of the above mentioned factors can seem very significant in managing the information of a rumour. However, that is not so. Only all the factors together create preconditions for the control of rumour’s information. Unfortunately, only theoretical.

The nature of a rumour is controversial. It contains antipodal things: private and public, moral and immoral, truth and a lie, among which it is difficult to draw a clear line, it is as in life. A rumour is constantly balancing on this line. There is no rumour unless the line is stepped over. Controversial nature of a rumour has its own reasons: gnosiological, psychological and sociological.

The roots of vitality of a rumour lie in the dual nature of this phenomenon. On the other hand, it is sustained by our constant thirst for additional, always fresher, but not always reliable information, trying to know a political individual, event or phenomenon better and more thoroughly. Satisfying this need, it stimulates the announcers of official information to look for more accurate, open, exhaustive ways, presented in an understandable and accessible form. That is exactly where the power of the effect of a rumour, a phenomenon without the authorship but with the authority to which, more or less, all of us obey lies.

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GANDŲ PASKIRTIS IR GAJUMAS: POLITINIAI ASPEKTAI

Valdas Pruskus

Aptariama gando socialinė instrumentinė paskirtis ir jos raiška. Atskleidžiama gandų socialinė ir politinė reikšmė, kontroliuojant grupės narių elgesį ir išsaugant jos tapatumą. Analizuojamas gando prigimties dvilypumas ir jį lemiančios gnoseologinės, psichologinės ir sociologinės prielaidos. Parodoma, kad gando (ir politinio) gajumo šaknys slypi, viena vertus, šio fenomeno dvilypume, kur keistu būdu sugyvena priešingi dalykai – privatumas ir viešumas, moralumas ir nemoralumas, tiesa ir melas, tarp kurių nubrėžti aiškią ribą nėra lengva ir paprasta net kasdieniniame gyvenime. Kita vertus, jį palaiko nuolatinis mūsų noras gauti papildomos ir vis šviežesnės, nors ir ne visai patikimos informacijos, siekiant kuo geriau ir visapusiškiau pažinti politikoje dalyvaujantį asmenį, įvykį ar reiškinį. Tenkindamas šį poreikį, kartu jis skatina oficialios informacijos skelbėjus ieškoti būdų, kad teikiama informacija būtų kiek įmanoma atviresnė, tikslesnė, išsamesnė, pateikta suprantama ir prieinama forma. Būtent tai ir yra gando, neturinčio autorystės, bet turinčio autoritetą, kuriam daugiau ar mažiau visi paklustame, paveikumo galia.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: gandas, informacija, komunikacija, politika, socialinė kontrolė, žiniasklaida, socialinės grupės, gandų gajumas.

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