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EMOTIONAL CONTAGION AND MOOD IN CROWD SERVING AS AUDIENCE

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Abstract

The global world is gradually becoming a world of separated crowds despite the artificial wire and wireless connection through television and the Internet. Crowds remain a prevailing subject of research in different social studies, and the research of changes in the psychological structure of crowds and their characteristics is still of primary interest. The main focus of the research is on the interpretation of the results of the research paper about a special separated crowd called audience. It was observed how students, constituting the crowd, perceive a crowd on video. The observation was focused on the research of emotional contagion and mood in the crowd serving as audience. While watching a mass event on a big screen, the crowd serving as audience emotionally converges with someone else, in our case with public speakers.

Key words: crowd, emotions in crowd, emotional contagion, leaders, public speakers, behavior, audience

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Introduction

Analyses of psychological crowds have brought us to the conclusion that so far psychology has not shown much scientific interest in psychology of crowds. Presumably the reason is adversity and unpredictability of crowds. As a result, psychologists paid much more attention to the research of the individual in small groups (family, working team etc.), for which natural or laboratory experiments could be conducted. Unpredictability of crowd structures, their large number, and interaction of different factors impede research, on the other hand, however, they agitate numerous researchers worldwide. (Barker, 2009, Christakis & Fowler, 2008, Tajfer, 2010, Reicher, 2013)

Research of psychology of crowds has witnessed numerous highs and lows since the end of the 19th century. Currently we are witnessing

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globalization, technological revolution, and various other social processes, and the present is gradually becoming a time of crowds. (Tajfer, 2010) As the American researcher of collective behavior, Judy Gahagan (1978) put it, »the interest in psychology of crowds is growing in proportion with the growth of rebellion, activity and action of crowds.«

The mood of crowd serving as audience

Audience is a passive form of collective behavior (Brown, 1986, »v«: M. Nastran Ule, 2000). Considering millions of people in front of television screens watching sport, entertaining, or political events at videoconferences (a combination of the Internet, television and video-media) thousands kilometers away from the armchair in their living room, or crowds that euphorically watched football games on big screens during the world championship in Korea in 2002, leads us to conclusion that collective behavior unnoticed invades the private life of the individual, his family, intimate life, living home. »Audience is associated with a compact psychological crowd because it consists of people gathered at a limited place. Blumer categorizes audience or crowd of spectators as a conventionalized crowd. In spite of the fact that audience enables the development of a conventional crowd, it cannot be called psychological crowd.« (R. H. Turner, 1987 b: 106) Because of that, short, blunt words of a public speaker or trend setter become much more effective than if spoken at a public event. Masses have an impact on opinions in surveys in all kinds of fields, from politics to marketing. The system of surveys is changing with entertainment, especially with the one that constitutes crowds as audience. Nowadays, crowds are identified as irrational, emotional, suggestible, liable for manipulation by leaders and public speakers. This research paper is a part of my long-time research of the inner structure of crowds.

Crowd and emotions

Emotions are the driving force of the development of thinking. Despite the fact that emotional experience and thinking are essentially connected, science in the previous century did not pay much attention to emotions. Peter Hobson is among many who observed this. Quite a few groundbreaking research papers about the issue were published during the last decades of the 19th century by Charles Darwin, William James and Sigmund Freud, however, they discussed mainly the nature of emotions, possible biological mechanisms they had emerged from, and symptoms and origins of emotional needs.

Research of emotions in collective behavior is a broad field, which is why a systematic and selective scientific approach is needed. At this

point I will resort to the approach employed by Judy Gahagan, the leading American researcher in the field of collective behavior. Judy Gahagan emphasizes the difference between the concept of emotional tension and emotional state. An individual in a crowd is in a state of enormous emotional tension. Le Bon and a few other scientists shared the opinion that emotional tension is connected with the lack of conditioning in the state of collective behavior. However, it became evident that emotional tension is an independent factor, which is not connected to cognitive processes.

Emotional state is defined as a certain emotion like enthusiasm, fury, anger etc. Although Le Bon defined crowd as emotional and contagious, he was right. Presently there is still no scientific proof for the connection between our emotions and thoughts, and actions in crowds. (J. Gahagan, 1975: 140) Future researchers are facing a huge moral dilemma and challenge when talking about the research of emotions in political and religious crowds: Are emotional characteristics of a crowd not dependent on cognitive processes characteristic of individuals in this crowd? Taking into account the findings of cognitive psychology and psychology of crowds, we are faced with the research of interactions between leaders of different kinds of crowds and individuals who take part in activities of these crowds. She continues: "Psychological focus is essential for the understanding of actions and emotions of individuals who take part in activities of a crowd. Sociological demonstration is equally important for the understanding of a mass phenomenon at a certain place, at a certain time and on certain social conditions that lead to these conditions."

An important turning point in the perception and analysis of the relationship between the leader and the crowd came with the occurrence of film and the mass phenomenon television. Since then the relationship between the leader and the audience is indirect and consequently, allegedly, more subconsciously manipulative and emotional. Motion pictures evoke emotions that we are not always consciously aware of. "Emotions that storm at the edge of our consciousness have a strong impact on our perceptions and reactions even if we are not aware of them." (D. Goleman, 2001: 74)

Methodology

Participants

304 students of Faculty of Social Sciences participated in the research. The most important role in the research had a crowd of students who

attended a lecture on certain conditions (the great hall at Faculty of Social Studies), as well as motivation of the crowd for the activity (by the lecturer who promoted the mass event, and motivation for the mass activity as a consequence of video recordings (voluntary participation in the survey).

Tools

In the research political-psychological approach was applied. The interpretation of the results is grounded in theoretical basis of selected scientists who are involved in the research of problems of political psychology, primarily of values and value orientation, ideals and ideology, and who are involved in, or touch upon problems of mass psychology. Most important among them are: S. Freud, R. Brown, E. Canetti, R. Inglehart, M. Rokeach, J. Musek, M. Nastran Ule, V. Pec jak, V. Miheljak and M. Polic . We have also applied the knowledge of other social and humanistic scientists–methodologists, like A. Tashakkori & C. Taddlie, M. Quinn Patton, S. Wright, A. Ferligoj, S. Splichal, N. Tos, V. Miheljak and S. Uhan. The basis of the research work is the original video and television recordings of the case study in Slovenia.

Identifying the research problem

The aim of the research was to analyze and explain how individuals (students) as audience perceive a mass structure *and* public speakers in video recordings shown to them.

Based on our studies of collective behavior we made a detailed analysis of two kinds of crowds in Slovenia: the observed crowd in the video recording named Festival upora (Festival of Rebellion), and the second type of crowd, the so called audience, consisting of students of Year 1 of Faculty of Social Studies, and their reactions to the above mentioned mass protests shown in video recordings. It must be mentioned that we intentionally used students' reactions to past events. Reactions were collected with a survey, the edited video film, which was a summary of the above mentioned events, was shown to the students directly before the survey was carried out.

Our aim was to study the relationship of the crowd to the shown video recording. We tried to identify the following elements and characteristics of the structure of crowd:

- a) value orientation of students serving as audience who were surveyed
- b) relationships of mutual connection between the crowd of students surveyed, and the observed crowd and speakers in video recordings

The hypothesis of the research was that there is a congruence of relationships between the crowd of students and speakers in video

recordings. Our aim was to identify basic value orientation of the audience—students by using a retrospective analysis of the above mentioned mass event and the analysis of the behavior of the observed audience.

Procedure

In the fall of 2014 we conducted research with a crowd of students of Year 1 in the great hall at Faculty of Social Studies. Students were asked to watch a video projection on the big screen, which I had edited. The 20-minute video film showed a mass gathering in Ljubljana, the so called Festival of Rebellion, which took place during the visit of the president of the USA George Bush and the president of Russian Federation Vladimir Putin. The video was recorded by a participant of the event and a cameraman.

Students, who presented the audience, evaluated their relationship:

- a) to the public speaker (leader) shown in the video recording and
- b) to the crowd also shown in the video recording.

The aim of the survey was to measure the reactions of the crowd (audience) in a separated place (the great hall) to the above mentioned event. The survey was anonymous. Students were asked standardized questions about value orientation. A special part of the survey consisted of questions aimed at the evaluation of the behavior of the speakers in video recordings and the evaluation of the behavior of the crowd.

The survey was conducted under guidance:

Firstly, the research problem was presented, and some initial clarifications about the conduct of survey were given.

Secondly, the survey was carried out, in which the students evaluated their value orientation.

Then, the 15-minute video recording of mass protests during the Festival of Rebellion in 2001 in Ljubljana was shown.

After watching the recording the audience answered questions about the above mentioned recording.

After that data processing and entry into PC was carried out. The data was processed using the statistical software package SPSS. The research was based on two research methods: quantitative and qualitative. The former is based on the analysis of the results of the survey of the perception of the crowd in video recordings. By using factographic analysis, multivariate statistic method enabled elimination of mostly burdened value orientations. Each participant responded

individually, however, some collective, latent elements of collected behavior were identified. The second aim was to identify changes in the perception of audience as a separated crowd in relation to the video recording of public speakers and the crowd.

Results

The mood of the students surveyed after the viewing of the video recording of mass protests at the Festival of Rebellion in 2001

Below is the analysis of the participants' answers to the following instruction: Describe your momentary mood from very good to very bad as a result of individual elements in the video recording (give one answer only).

Public speeches had a profound impact on the crowd as the second most frequent element in the video recording. After viewing this element 109 or 35.9 % of the participants described their mood as mediocre. Most participants (114 of 304) described their mood as good.

Considering the results we came to the following conclusions: Arithmetical average includes values in the interval from 2.08 to 3.64. The lowest value has the variable 'banners', the highest the variable 'hooting of cars', which means that on average the biggest differences among the respondents are in the variable 'hooting of cars', the smallest in 'banners'. Standard deviation is between 0.85 and 1.28. There are small differences in dispersion. Median value is in the interval from 2 to 4. Variables 'banners' and 'public speeches' have value 2, 'hooting of cars' and 'presence of police' have the highest value 4.

The coefficient of asymmetry in the above mentioned elements of the mood has more negative than positive values. We observed a slight asymmetry to the right of the strength in the interval from -0.34 to 0.34 . There is basically no asymmetry in the variable 'presence of police', most asymmetric is the variable 'banners'. The coefficient 'flattening' has negative and one positive value. All variables with negative value are flatly distributed. Point distribution is seen in only one variable, 'silence in crowd'. The coefficient of flattening includes values from 0.08 ('silence in crowd') to -0.96 ('presence of police').

Emotional contagion after watching the video recording of mass protests at the Festival of Rebellion in 2001

The audience was given the following instruction: In their speeches the speakers used emotional expressions; without much thinking, appoint emotions in the list which you experienced (three answers only).

Presentation of results of the experiment χ^2 of variables: fear, panic, courage, zeal, loyalty, enthusiasm, shyness, disgust, stress, joy, anger, disinterest, and others that present the emotional state of the respondents.

Discussion

We believe that the research proved the thesis about intense relationship between a leader, an individual in a crowd, and a crowd. It also led us to the following conclusion: When a group of people gathers with a specific purpose (crowd as audience), subtle and unconscious synchronisation of emotions in a collective action takes place. Members of the crowd, who responded to the survey, unconsciously mimicked the emotions, primarily of the leader (public speaker). It was done through unconscious mimicry of non-verbal and verbal communication of the public speaker (his facial expressions, tone of voice) and other forms of non-verbal communication, and unconscious synchronization of emotions. The most important role in the research had a crowd of students who attended a lecture on certain conditions (the great hall at Faculty of Social Studies), as well as motivation of the crowd for the activity (by the lecturer who promoted the mass event) and motivation for the mass activity as a consequence of video recordings (voluntary participation in the survey). The results prove the thesis of the researcher of emotional intelligence Goleman, who claimed that emotions are contagious. Video projection of mass events to a crowd is a subtle proof of non-verbal synchronization of emotions, which happens on regular basis in every-day life. Mass events intensify synchronization of emotions and change the mood as well as the speed of the change of mood, which was proved by the comparison between different time elements in the research. The time lapse between the answer to the question about general mood of the members of the crowd before watching the video and the answer to the question about the mood according to the projected elements on the video was about 15 minutes.

Mood of audience

The mood of the crowd changes according to the various emotional elements executed by the leader or public speaker. Presentation of mass conditions shown on the video influence the individuals in the crowd who change their mood. In case of a longer time lapse (Festival of Rebellion) the crowd responded primarily to positive emotional states of public speakers. Negative emotions played a secondary role. A public speaker even if not personally present can indirectly, through a video projection, influence mood and emotional state of a crowd. Comparison of different elements shows that speeches have the biggest influence on a crowd. At the Festival of Rebellion, 109 respondents felt mediocre, 51 bad and 114 good. Tone of voice of public speakers made a very strong impression on 140 respondents, and strong impression on 71 respondents. The results prove the thesis of the researcher of emotional intelligence Goleman, who claimed that emotions are contagious. Video projection of mass events to a crowd is a subtle proof of non-verbal synchronization of emotions, which happens on regular basis in everyday life. Mass events intensify synchronization of emotions and change the mood as well as the speed of the change of mood, which was proved by the comparison between different time elements in the research. The time lapse between the answer to the question about the general mood of the members of the crowd before watching the video and the answer to the question about the mood according to the projected elements on the video was about 15 minutes. Members of the crowd, who responded to the survey, unconsciously mimicked the emotions, primarily of the leader (public speaker). It was done through unconscious mimicry of non-verbal and verbal communication of the public speaker (his facial expressions, tone of voice) and other forms of non-verbal communication and unconscious synchronization of emotions. The most important role in the research had a crowd of students who attended a lecture on certain conditions (the great hall at Faculty of Social Studies), as well as motivation of the crowd for the activity (by the lecturer who promoted the mass event), and motivation for the mass activity as a consequence of video recordings (voluntary participation in the survey).

I think that the research proved the thesis about intense synchronization between a leader, an individual in a crowd, and a crowd but it also led to the following conclusions:

1. When a group of people gathers with a specific purpose (crowd as audience), subtle and unconscious synchronisation of emotions in a collective action takes place.

2. A separated crowd (students-respondents serving as audience), while watching a mass event on a big video screen, unconsciously mimicked the emotions of someone else, in our case of the public speaker.

This leads us to one of the most important conclusions of the research.

3. While watching a mass event on a big screen, a crowd serving as audience mimics and takes over the mood of someone else, in our case of public speakers.

There are, however, still other conclusions:

4. We came to the conclusion that activists of new social movements are usually individuals who express their emotions vividly and stronger than other individuals, and whose non-verbal and verbal communication is exceptionally effective.

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