

PROPAGANDA AND COUNTER-PROPAGANDA IN THE NEW PARADIGM OF MASS COMMUNICATION: THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract: The article explores the transformation of propaganda and counterpropaganda in the context of the new paradigm of mass communication, shaped by digital networks, interactivity, and algorithmic mediation. Starting from classical theories of propaganda and communication models in the digital era, the article analyzes the manner in which propaganda has evolved from predominantly unidirectional processes to distributed and participatory forms. Increased attention is given to the relational dimension between propaganda and counterpropaganda. Counterpropaganda is conceptualized not only as an institutional response, but as a broader field of civic engagement, encompassing collaborative fact-checking, participation at the local level, and the construction of alternative narratives.

The paper proposes an integrative analytical framework for the study of contemporary cases of communication in situations of conflict, crisis, or war, with reference to Russian propaganda and Ukrainian counterpropaganda. This framework combines qualitative and quantitative research methods, including content analysis, network analysis, discourse analysis, and visual analysis, in order to capture the circulation of narratives and the dynamics of propagation within networks.

The article contributes theoretically by recontextualizing propaganda as a component of the informational ecology, rather than as a purely linear communicative process. From a methodological perspective, the article proposes a flexible research framework applicable to the study of propaganda and counterpropaganda in information warfare. The results provide analytical reference points for understanding communicative resilience in contemporary digital societies.

Keywords: *propaganda, counter-propaganda, network paradigm, digital communication, content analysis, Russia-Ukraine conflict, communicative resilience.*

1. Introduction

The transformations of mass communication, driven by digitalization, interactivity, and algorithmization, have fundamentally altered the way propaganda and counterpropaganda manifest in the public sphere. While the classical models formulated by Lasswell (1927), Bernays (1928), or Ellul (1962) conceptualized propaganda as a predominantly unidirectional process, institutionally controlled and oriented from the top down, the new paradigm of mass communication redefines the relationships between sender, message, and audience. Communication

described exclusively through centralized flows must now be understood in terms of distributed, dynamic, and participatory processes.

In this context, propaganda and counterpropaganda operate within a complex informational ecology, in which individuals, digital platforms, algorithms, social networks, and state and non-state actors simultaneously contribute to the production, circulation, and contestation of messages. Digital infrastructures—social media platforms, algorithmic mechanisms, and artificial intelligence applications—radically transform this ecology, influencing content visibility, dissemination speed, and the capacity of certain narratives to become dominant. The public—the passive receiver—transforms into a creator, assuming an active role in the amplification, contestation, and mediation of information.

The laboratory of propaganda acquires distinct characteristics compared to earlier periods: decentralized dissemination, accelerated dynamism, micro-targeting, and the emergence of influential nodes capable of massively amplifying narratives, independently of the credibility of the initial source. In response, counterpropaganda is no longer limited to traditional institutional reactions, such as official messages or the point-by-point debunking of false information. Increasingly, it includes participatory intervention (collaborative fact-checking, online civic mobilization, OSINT expert networks) and the production of counter-narratives distributed by digital communities.

Contemporary literature extensively analyzes disinformation, digital propaganda, and the role of communication platforms in current conflicts (Castells, 2009; Miskimmon, O'Loughlin & Roselle, 2018; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Nevertheless, there remains a need for approaches that coherently integrate classical theoretical perspectives with the transformations induced by network logic. Methodological frameworks are needed that combine content analysis, network analysis, discourse analysis, and visual analysis in a unified approach applicable to contexts of crisis, conflict, or war. The articulation of these methods from the perspective of strategic narratives and strategic communication, in relation to dynamics of security and political stability, remains a major theoretical and methodological challenge.

The aim of this article is to explore the ways in which propaganda and counterpropaganda are reconfigured within the new paradigm of mass communication and to propose an integrative theoretical–methodological framework applicable to contemporary case studies. The analysis focuses on the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, used as an illustrative case study for broader dynamics of digital propaganda. Starting from classical models and recontextualizing them within the logic of informational ecology, the article examines the mechanisms of narrative circulation, the role of institutional and non-institutional actors, and the processes through which digital societies build communicative resilience.

The research questions are:

- ✓ How are the concepts of propaganda and counterpropaganda transformed in the context of networked communication?
- ✓ In what ways can classical methods of analysis—content analysis, network analysis, discourse analysis, and visual analysis—be adapted to capture the specific features of digital environments?
- ✓ What narrative, visual, and algorithmic mechanisms characterize Russian propaganda and Ukrainian counterpropaganda in the current conflict?

Through the analysis of a unified conceptual and methodological model, the article contributes to the understanding of propaganda as a phenomenon of informational ecology and highlights the relevance of interdisciplinary approaches in the analysis of contemporary conflicts. The results may support the development of analytical tools useful both in academic research and in institutional and civic practice oriented toward combating disinformation, strengthening communicative resilience, and national security.

2. Classical models of propaganda

The study of propaganda took shape as a distinct field as early as the first half of the twentieth century, through the contributions of authors who systematically analyzed the relationship between communication, power, and social influence. Among these, Harold Lasswell, Edward Bernays, and Jacques Ellul formulated theoretical models that became fundamental reference points in propaganda research.

Harold Lasswell (1927) is considered one of the pioneers of propaganda analysis, defining it as a technique for managing public opinion through the symbolic manipulation of messages. His model, later synthesized in the famous formula “who says what, to whom, through which channel, and with what effect” (Lasswell, 1948), conceptualizes propaganda as a strategic, predominantly unidirectional process, institutionally controlled and oriented toward achieving measurable effects on the public. Lasswell emphasizes the structural character of propaganda in the activity of states, arguing that all governments are involved, to some extent, in propagandistic practices even in times of peace (Lasswell, 1927, p. 14). In contexts of crisis or war, propaganda becomes a central instrument for mobilizing public opinion, the main dilemma being related to the degree of transparency of this activity.

Edward Bernays (1928) extends the analysis of propaganda within modern democratic societies through the concept of the “engineering of consent”. For Bernays, the deliberate manipulation of public opinion does not represent an anomaly, but an inevitable component of the functioning of mass democracies. Propaganda and public relations are conceived as

mechanisms for constructing social consensus, based on collective psychology and strategic communication expertise. Bernays defines modern propaganda as a systematic and long-term effort to shape events and public perceptions, capable of influencing individuals' relationships with ideas, organizations, or social groups (Bernays, 1928, p. 25).

Jacques Ellul (1962) reforms this perspective by broadening the meaning of propaganda. Propaganda is conceptualized as a total sociological phenomenon, structurally integrated into modern society. Ellul argues that effective propaganda must be total and continuous, through adaptation to various audience segments and psychological contexts, as well as through the simultaneous use of multiple communication channels. Each medium has a specific function within this coordinated ensemble, which acts upon individuals at the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral levels (Ellul, 1962, p. 10). Propaganda is not limited to mass media and strictly communicational approaches, but also includes domains such as education, religion, justice, diplomacy, and the rewriting of history, thus contributing to the adaptation of individuals to the social and technological environment. Ellul distinguishes several forms of propaganda—direct, sociological, of the word, of deeds, open (“white”) and hidden (“black”)—highlighting its omnipresent character and deep integration into the structures of modern society (Ellul, 1962, pp. 14-15). Political circumstances constituted effective and immediate causes of the development of mass propaganda. Thus, events such as the First World War, the Russian Revolution of 1917, Hitler’s revolution of 1933, the Second World War, and the Cold War are mentioned—each representing stages in the development of modern propaganda. With each historical moment, propaganda continued to evolve, deepen, and refine its methods. In parallel, it expanded to new nations and territories, starting from an essential principle: in order to reach the adversary, one must use the adversary’s own instruments. This solid reasoning lies at the basis of the systematic development of propaganda.

Nevertheless, overall, the classical models formulated by Lasswell, Bernays, and Ellul present propaganda as a centralized, intentional process dependent on vertical communication flows, in which the sender holds control over the message and the channels of dissemination. Propaganda is understood as a strategic instrument for influencing public opinion, managed by political, economic, or cultural elites and reinforced by various historical contexts. These models constitute the theoretical foundation of propaganda studies. They are essentially transformed by subsequent processes of digitalization and algorithmization of communication. Thus, the relationships between actors, messages, and the public are radically modified.

3. Modern paradigms of communication

The rise of digital media and networks has produced a structural transformation of the paradigm of mass communication. Communication is organized within a socio-technological ecosystem, guided by participation and multidirectionality. The centralized and unidirectional flow becomes decentralized and disseminated in multiple directions by a dynamic ensemble of human actors and social norms. Within the informational ecology model, through algorithms, actors interact simultaneously in the production, distribution, and contestation of messages.

Digitalization has weakened the traditional infrastructures of political communication and international relations through the multiplication of actors, the opacification of channels, and the erosion of classical mechanisms of information validation. In this context, distinctions between legitimate actors and manipulative practices become increasingly difficult to establish, the public space being marked by uncertainty, fragmentation, and intense narrative competition. As Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle (2018) observe, digital media complicate the articulation of coherent political positions and weaken the capacity to build consensus, affecting both internal and external communication. "Leaks, bots, hackers, crowds: no wonder policymakers often seem paralyzed when they are supposed to articulate difficult positions. Communication channels seem insecure. The communication spaces in which we used to find journalists, NGOs, and the public are no longer trustworthy." (Miskimmon et al., 2018, p. 3).

A major reference point for interpreting these transformations is Manuel Castells' (2009) analysis of network logics. The author argues that the social structure of the informational age is organized around open networks, in which power circulates through the control of informational flows. Within this flexible framework, propaganda no longer functions as a self-contained, centralized act, but depends on the arithmetic of networks and the architecture of visibility and amplification mechanisms of digital platforms. Specifically, propaganda is an emergent process, characterized by speed, replicability, and decentralized distribution, resulting from network-based communicational organization.

Power is defined by Castells (2009) as a relational capacity for asymmetric influence over social decisions and actions, exercised both through coercion and through the shaping of meaning. Although power relations are distributed throughout society, the state remains a central actor, relying on resources such as violence, economic capital, and, crucially, trust. In the network society, the capacity to build, maintain, or erode trust becomes an essential strategic resource, closely linked to the control of narratives and informational flows.

The participatory dimension constitutes a defining element of the new communicational paradigm. The literature on participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006) and distributed communication (Shirky, 2008) indicates

a reconfiguration of the relationship between producers and audiences, in which users become actors involved in the generation, dissemination, and contestation of media narratives. Owing to new communication tools—referred to as “social software,” “social media,” or “social computing” (Shirky, 2008, p. 20)—people’s capacity to share, cooperate, and act collectively has increased dramatically outside traditional institutions. Initially used in technological and academic environments, these tools rapidly expanded into society, facilitating the self-assembly of groups without formal coordination and reducing the costs associated with organization. Thus, old limits related to the scale and complexity of informal collaboration are altered, and people can contribute spontaneously to common projects. Electronic networks enable “new forms of collective action” and make possible the “new ease of assembly” (Shirky, 2008, p. 48). This challenges the status quo, as non-institutional groups can carry out large-scale projects beyond formal organizations. New communication tools and associated social models lead to “a period of intense experimentation” (Shirky, 2008, p. 49), with effects varying according to how connected people are within these groups.

With regard to participation, it is not evenly distributed. Access to visibility, influence, and mobilization capacity is conditioned by skills, resources, social capital, and actors’ positioning within networks, while digital platforms may contribute to the reproduction or even the intensification of pre-existing inequalities. In this context, participatory culture can be conceptualized more as a normative ideal and an ongoing process than as a fully realized empirical state. Thus, participatory culture is presented as an ideal toward which we strive, not as something already achieved. There are still “social and technological barriers” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 22) that hinder full participation, and many groups remain excluded or unable to contribute meaningfully. New media platforms offer opportunities, but also limitations, potentially generating conflict and marginalization. In the absence of clear norms for these interactions, commitment to participatory culture entails a continuous effort to reduce differences in access and participation.

Within this informational ecosystem, communication can no longer be understood as a linear process, but as a participatory and contested one, deeply embedded in political dynamics. Control over the visibility and circulation of messages thus becomes essential in an unstable space dominated by competition for meaning. This reconfiguration leads to a theoretical shift from sender-centered models toward the analysis of the emergent circulation of messages within a complex socio-technological environment, differentiating classical paradigms of propaganda and outlining the analytical framework for the contemporary digital forms addressed below.

4. Propaganda and counterpropaganda in the digital era

The digital environment breaks the linear logic of communication between propaganda and counterpropaganda. The circulation and visibility of content result from algorithmic logics. Propaganda operates simultaneously as intention and distribution. Counterpropaganda extends beyond traditional institutional responses.

The analysis of the justification of war—particularly in the context of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine—requires increased attention to both domestic and international political communication. As competing actors engage in the conflict, states resort to various strategic communication strategies, aimed at inducing multiple and often contradictory interpretations of events. Mass media and digital platforms play a central role in shaping, disseminating, and legitimizing these interpretations, functioning as key arenas through which states exercise symbolic power and seek to influence public perception (Danciu, 2023). From this perspective, propaganda is not merely an instrument of persuasion, but a strategic mechanism through which political actors attempt to stabilize preferred narratives about legitimacy, responsibility, and violence.

A relevant direction for the analysis of digital propaganda is what Bjola and Pamment describe as the “dark side” of digital diplomacy. Within this framework, manipulative content can acquire sufficient influence to constrain institutional actors to address it strategically, not merely reactively (Bjola & Pamment, 2019). “Alternative realities” constructed online undermine trust in institutions and affect the minimal conditions of public deliberation, with visible effects including the diplomatic space (Bjola & Pamment, 2019, p. 1).

For democratic states, this dynamic generates an ethical dilemma. Countering disinformation must be carried out without eroding moral authority and credibility, essential resources in narrative competition (Bjola & Pamment, 2019, p. 176). At the same time, algorithmic distribution and the circumvention of traditional media filters accelerate the spread of disinformation and increase its persistence in closed informational spaces, reinforced by confirmation bias (Bjola & Pamment, 2019, p. 177). From this perspective, the effectiveness of counterpropaganda depends not exclusively on debunking content, but also on the capacity to intervene in the social and technical conditions that facilitate its circulation.

A central element of this informational ecology is distributed verification. Practices such as collaborative fact-checking and open-source investigations are gaining an increasingly important role. Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) show that the use of the general label “fake news” is problematic, as it tends to homogenize distinct phenomena (satire, propaganda, fabrication, manipulation, advertising), with different implications for research and public policy. Instead of this approach, the authors propose more precise terminology and increased methodological

attention to the infrastructure of distribution. Verification no longer targets only claims, but also the sources and networks through which content is produced and disseminated, as well as the associated coordination signals (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017, p. 18).

At the same time, debunking may have ambivalent effects: exposing a marginal narrative can amplify it by giving it “oxygen,” which is why the authors also discuss editorial criteria, including “strategic silence,” depending on the probability of virality (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017, p. 19). For research design, these observations suggest a set of operational steps to be used in the case analysis presented later: (a) identifying the type of problematic content, (b) analyzing the distribution pathway, (c) assessing amplification potential, (d) deciding between debunking, contextualization, or non-intervention.

Within this framework, participatory counterpropaganda can be understood not only as a reaction to false messages, but as the production and circulation of counter-narratives, both supported by civic mobilization and by informal alliances between institutions, experts, and online communities. A relevant example is the report *How Ukraine fights Russian disinformation: Beehive vs mammoth* (Kalenský & Osadchuk, 2024), which describes a model of informational defense built gradually after Euromaidan and consolidated after the invasion of February 2022. The report highlights, among other aspects, the role of systematic monitoring of the informational space, rapid response (debunking/rebuttals), investment in resources and expertise, as well as flexible cooperation between the state and civil society (Kalenský & Osadchuk, 2024). The “beehive” metaphor describes precisely this type of organization: autonomous, interconnected cells with the capacity for reaction and adaptation (Kalenský & Osadchuk, 2024, p. 18). From a methodological perspective, the report is particularly useful as an inventory of practices and as a source of hypotheses about the institutional and cultural conditions of resilience (e.g., the presence of institutions where the audience is; cooperation with OSINT communities; rapid pace of countering; the relationship between humor/memetics and morale).

However, the report also highlights structural limitations: influence is not simply measured through visible indicators (views, shares), and the adversary constantly adapts its techniques (Kalenský & Osadchuk, 2024).

The report concludes that Ukraine faces an adaptable, persistent adversary experienced in active measures. Visible indicators, such as views or shares, do not reflect real influence. Russia can achieve tactical successes by delaying Western aid or by maintaining myths regarding escalation. Even while losing individual informational battles, it remains a dangerous actor. On the other hand, Ukraine cannot sustain this effort alone. Experts propose the establishment of an “information Ramstein” (Kalenský & Osadchuk, 2024, p. 37), a global alliance intended to counter

Russian propaganda through: closing toxic channels, investigating agents of influence, labeling malicious sources, financial sanctions, and cooperation with digital platforms. The persistence of Russian narratives in Western public opinion shows that such cooperation is essential.

Overall, propaganda and counterpropaganda in the digital era must be understood as competing processes of producing, circulating, and contesting meaning within a distributed informational ecosystem. Control of narratives is not exercised exclusively through strategic emission, but through configuring the conditions of visibility, amplification, and legitimacy within socio-technological networks. In this context, counterpropaganda is no longer merely an institutional reaction, but a hybrid practice involving the state, civil society, online communities, and experts, operating through mechanisms such as distributed verification, the production of counter-narratives, and participatory mobilization.

The case of Ukraine illustrates how these dynamics can be operationalized in a conflict context, highlighting both the potential and the limits of communicative resilience. The effectiveness of counterpropaganda depends on the combination of institutional capacity, cooperation with civil society, presence in relevant digital spaces, and rapid adaptability to emerging informational tactics. At the same time, these dynamics confirm that the impact of propaganda cannot be evaluated exclusively through visible quantitative indicators, but requires an integrated analysis of narratives, networks, and distribution infrastructures.

Building on these observations, the article further proposes a theoretical–methodological framework that integrates content analysis, network analysis, discourse analysis, and visual analysis. The aim is to capture the complexity of propaganda and counterpropaganda in contemporary conflicts. The following section details this analytical framework and its modes of application in the study of digital strategic communication.

5. Methodological perspectives

The methodological contribution of this article consists in the formulation of an integrative framework for the analysis of propaganda and counterpropaganda in digital environments. The framework is designed to capture both the structural dimension of information circulation and the symbolic processes involved in the production of meaning in contexts of crisis, conflict, or war.

The proposed approach combines quantitative and qualitative methods. The analysis begins with exploratory tools for mapping communicational dynamics and continues with interpretative examinations of narratives, discourses, and visual materials.

This methodological choice responds to recent transformations in digital communication, in which messages can no longer be treated as isolated units, but as elements of interconnected systems of production and circulation. In this sense, Krippendorff (2013) emphasizes the need for methodologies

adapted to the complexity of digital environments and for more sophisticated theoretical frameworks, open to interdisciplinary approaches, including from cognitive sciences and artificial intelligence (Krippendorff, 2013, pp. 4-5).

The increased volume of data available online exceeds the capacity of individual analysis. This context imposes collaborative practices, standardized procedures, and the use of computer-assisted tools, with direct implications for the transparency and epistemological control of the analytical process.

The proposed methodological framework operates through an analytical sequencing in four stages. The first stage uses exploratory quantitative tools, such as content analysis of dominant narratives, measurement of frequency and thematic co-occurrence, and the identification of recurrent discursive markers. The second stage consists of network analysis, applied to map central actors, discursive communities, and mechanisms of algorithmic amplification on platforms relevant to digital political communication, such as Twitter/X, Telegram, TikTok, and YouTube.

The results of the quantitative and network analyses guide the selection of a relevant corpus for in-depth qualitative investigations. In the third stage, discourse analysis aims to identify recurrent rhetorical strategies used in propagandistic communication (for example, the legitimization of violence, the delegitimization of the adversary, appeals to historical memory or existential security). The fourth stage consists of visual analysis of images, memes, and video materials, with an emphasis on the aesthetics of digital platforms, the affective registers mobilized, and the relationship between visual formats and the dynamics of virality.

The framework conceptualizes propaganda and counter-propaganda as emergent relational processes, integrated within a complex informational ecology. In this space, institutional communication interacts with civic initiatives of collaborative verification, OSINT, and the production of counter-narratives.

Due to its modular and flexible character, the methodology is designed as a transferable instrument. It can also be applied in other contexts of crisis or conflict, beyond the case study analyzed here.

The application of the methodological framework is illustrated through the analysis of the Russia–Ukraine conflict, presented in the following section. This details the data used, the key moments investigated, and the narrative, visual, and relational patterns identified in the information war between the two media fronts.

6. Propaganda and counterpropaganda in the Russia–Ukraine conflict: case analysis

6.1. Data and analytical corpus

Based on the methodological framework described above, the empirical analysis examines the dynamics of digital propaganda and counterpropaganda in the Russia–Ukraine conflict. The study focuses on communication carried

out on social platforms with strategic relevance for contemporary information warfare—Twitter/X, Telegram, TikTok, and YouTube. These platforms were selected for the distinct roles they play in the circulation of political and affective messages.

The analytical corpus comprises 2,000 units of content, collected between January 2023 and March 2024. The materials include texts, images, memes, and video materials, produced in Russian, Ukrainian, and English. The selection combined temporal and thematic criteria and used highly visible sources, along with recurrent hashtags or civic communication and verification initiatives. This strategy enabled the inclusion of both institutional and non-institutional actors.

The corpus is not designed as a statistically representative sample. It functions as an analytical instrument oriented toward identifying the narrative, visual, and relational mechanisms of digital communication. The recurrence of the identified frames indicates the attainment of analytical saturation for the investigated patterns. Illustrative examples are presented in Appendices A and B.

6.2. Key moments analyzed (2023-2024)

The analysis focuses on episodes of intensified digital communication, selected for their strategic relevance and for their high level of visibility within platform ecosystems.

In January–February 2023, against the background of intense fighting in the Bakhmut area, an amplification of narratives about the “inevitability of victory” and the “attrition of the adversary” takes shape. These are supported by the reuse of video materials and the circulation of military maps, particularly on Telegram and Twitter/X.

In June–July 2023, with the Ukrainian counteroffensive, two opposing registers are activated simultaneously. Pro-Russian propaganda insists on the idea of “strategic failure,” while Ukrainian counter-narratives emphasize resilience and international solidarity. Dissemination relies predominantly on short visual formats, circulated on TikTok and YouTube Shorts.

In October 2023, in the context of attacks on energy infrastructure, antagonistic narrative frames re-emerge. These gravitate around the ideas of “imminent collapse” and “civic adaptation” and are heavily mediated through nighttime images and videos with high emotional impact.

In February 2024, two years after the full-scale invasion, digital communication reaches a symbolic peak. This manifests through narrative syntheses, visual retrospectives, and the reactivation of fundamental discursive repertoires on both sides.

6.3. Narrative analysis

Discourse analysis highlights recurrent narrative frames that circulate across platforms and adapt depending on account type and target audience. Pro-Russian narratives are frequently articulated around the legitimization of aggression, presented as defensive or inevitable action, through appeals to existential security, the protection of Russophone populations, and historical continuity. These frames are stabilized through pseudo-explanatory styles and repeated references to the same affiliated media ecosystems.

In contrast, Ukrainian counterpropaganda is organized around sovereignty and civic resilience, as well as the delegitimization of aggression. It combines institutional communication with distributed practices of contestation and information correction. Differences between registers are accentuated by the typology of the accounts involved. Institutional accounts tend to stabilize messages, while influencer-type actors intensify the affective and interpretative dimension. Amplification nodes favor standardized formulas and the recirculation of the same sources.

6.4. The visual dimension

Visual analysis indicates the systematic use of images and video materials as instruments of narrative condensation and affective mobilization. Pro-Russian communication relies on stylized visual patterns that draw on military symbols and abstract representations of threat. This register blurs the boundary between information and propaganda and favors the circulation of materials in reusable forms, adaptable across platforms.

By contrast, Ukrainian visual communication and civic counterpropaganda initiatives privilege formats associated with authenticity. Unfiltered images and short video materials support affective identification and facilitate viral distribution. The aesthetics of authenticity thus function as a central element of counter-narrative strategies.

6.5. Network dynamics and algorithmic amplification

Network analysis highlights consistent structural differences between pro-Russian digital ecosystems and those associated with Ukrainian counterpropaganda. Pro-Russian networks are characterized by high density and source recurrence, suggesting relatively stable and homogeneous distribution infrastructures. By contrast, Ukrainian networks are more heterogeneous and flexible, facilitating the transversal circulation of counter-narratives.

The temporal dynamics of messages indicate activity peaks during moments of conflict intensification. These increases suggest an important role for algorithmic mechanisms in amplifying emotionally charged content. In this context, collaborative fact-checking and the strategic use

of hashtags emerge as recurrent practices of contestation and communicative resilience.

7. Conclusions

This article has analyzed the transformations of propaganda and counterpropaganda in the context of the new paradigm of mass communication, characterized by interactivity, digital networks, and algorithmizing. The results confirm the relevance of the classical models formulated by Lasswell, Bernays, and Ellul, but show that they must be recontextualized in order to capture the complexity of contemporary informational ecologies, in which the circulation of messages is shaped by socio-technical infrastructures and the active participation of users.

With regard to the first research question, the analysis demonstrates that propaganda and counterpropaganda can no longer be conceived exclusively as centralized, unidirectional, and institutionally controlled processes. In the new paradigm of networked communication, these phenomena become simultaneously strategic and emergent processes, in which institutional actors interact with participatory communities, coordinated networks, and algorithmic mechanisms. Propaganda manifests itself through the diversification of narratives and the exploitation of amplification infrastructures, while counterpropaganda extends beyond official reactions, integrating civic, collaborative, and distributed practices.

Addressing the second research question, the article shows that classical methods can be adapted to digital environments only through their integration into a coherent analytical framework. The sequential approach allows for the examination not only of messages, but also of the technical and relational mechanisms that condition their circulation and impact. In this context, methodological triangulation becomes indispensable for managing the high volume of data and the interdependence between the symbolic and infrastructural dimensions of communication.

Regarding the third research question, the case study of the Russia-Ukraine conflict highlights distinct mechanisms of propaganda and counterpropaganda. Pro-Russian communication relies on coordinated distribution and stable amplification infrastructures. By contrast, Ukrainian counterpropaganda privileges narrative coherence and legitimacy constructed through authenticity and civic mobilization. The results suggest that the effectiveness of digital communication is not determined by volume, but by the capacity to generate trust and identification within informational ecologies.

The main theoretical contribution of the article lies in the reconceptualization of propaganda as a phenomenon of informational ecology, in which the production, circulation, and contestation of messages are distributed among human and non-human actors, and meaning is continuously negotiated within digital platforms. From a methodological perspective, the article proposes and validates a flexible

and transferable analytical framework, suitable for the study of propaganda in contemporary conflicts and in other crisis contexts, pandemics, or digitally mediated social mobilizations, as well as in other contexts, such as electoral campaigns.

The limitations of the research are related to access to publicly available data on platforms and to the difficulty of fully identifying coordinated networks or automated behaviors, in the context of restrictions imposed by digital infrastructures. These constraints particularly affect the analysis of distribution and coordination at large scale.

Future research directions include extending the analysis toward emerging forms of propaganda, including content generated by artificial intelligence. Additional investigations are needed into the use of deepfakes in conflict contexts and into the dynamics of long-term communicative resilience. Furthermore, comparisons between informational ecosystems in democratic and authoritarian regimes may offer additional insights.

In conclusion, recent transformations of mass communication reconfigure both propaganda and counterpropaganda. Understanding these processes requires interdisciplinary approaches sensitive to the interaction between narratives, networks, and technologies. The results of the study provide useful conceptual and methodological reference points for research and for institutional practices oriented toward the analysis and countering of disinformation in digital environments.

Appendix A. Illustrative Examples of Narrative Content from the Corpus

The examples presented in this appendix consist of analytical descriptions of textual content units included in the corpus. Original materials are not reproduced; instead, examples are paraphrased and contextualized in order to highlight the narrative patterns identified in the analysis.

A1.

Platform: Telegram

Account type: Media-affiliated channel

Language: Russian

Period: February 2023

Description: Narrative frame legitimizing military action through appeals to existential security and the protection of Russian-speaking populations; the conflict is presented as inevitable and defensive.

A2.

Platform: X/Twitter

Account type: Political commentator account

Language: Russian

Period: June 2023

Description: Delegitimizing narrative frame targeting the Ukrainian counteroffensive, employing evaluative formulations (e.g., “failure,” “massive losses”) and recurrent linking to external sources.

A3.

Platform: Telegram

Account type: Institutional channel

Language: Ukrainian
Period: June 2023
Description: Counter-narrative focused on resilience and incremental progress, combined with appeals to civic solidarity and international support.

A4.

Platform: X/Twitter
Account type: Civic initiative / fact-checking account
Language: English
Period: October 2023
Description: Debunking of a propagandistic claim through contextualization and references to verified sources; use of the thread format to enable gradual clarification.

A5.

Platform: X/Twitter
Account type: Ukrainian institutional account
Language: English
Period: February 2024
Description: Commemorative and retrospective narrative rearticulating the conflict in terms of the defense of international order and democratic values.

A6.

Platform: Telegram
Account type: Amplification channel
Language: Russian
Period: February 2024
Description: Repetitive reposting of identical messages and links with minimal variation, suggesting a predominantly distributive function within the network.

Appendix B. Illustrative Examples of Visual and Multimodal Content from the Corpus

This appendix includes analytical descriptions of visual and multimodal materials examined in the study, supplemented, where relevant, by anonymized visual examples. The presentation aims to highlight the symbolic and affective functions of the content rather than to reproduce the original materials in full.

B1.

Platform: Telegram
Content type: Stylized image
Language: Russian
Period: January 2023
Description: Image featuring military iconography and historical symbolic elements, used to naturalize the conflict and legitimize armed action.

B2.

Platform: TikTok
Content type: Short video
Language: Ukrainian
Period: June 2023
Description: “Authentic” video material recorded on a mobile phone, depicting everyday life in a war context; emphasis on proximity and emotional engagement.

B3.

Platform: X/Twitter
Content type: Meme
Language: English
Period: July 2023
Description: Use of irony and visual humor to re-signify a propagandistic message and contest the authority of the original source.

B4.

Platform: YouTube (Shorts)
 Content type: Explanatory video
 Language: Russian
 Period: October 2023
 Description: Pseudo-analytical material employing simplified maps and graphics to convey an appearance of expertise and objectivity.

B5.
 Platform: TikTok
 Content type: Civic-oriented video
 Language: English
 Period: February 2024
 Description: Clip oriented toward affective mobilization and international solidarity, combining archival imagery with overlaid text and emotional music.

The examples presented in the appendices and any associated figures serve an exclusively illustrative and analytical purpose. Account identifiers, active links, and branding elements have been removed or generalized in accordance with ethical principles governing digital research.

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