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HOW TO SPOT THE ELEPHANT?: THE TECHNOLOGICAL APPROACH AS A METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATION FOR THE STUDY OF POLITICAL PROPAGANDA

The study examines the technological approach as a methodological foundation for analyzing political propaganda, highlighting its growing relevance in today's information environment. The research aims to explore the heuristic potential of the technological approach in uncovering the essence and operative principles of political propaganda, particularly focusing on how it shapes public opinion and behavior through sophisticated technological means. The methodology employs an integrative framework combining axiomatic, hypothetico-deductive methods, and the approach of ascending from abstract to concrete. The technological approach integrates insights from political science, psychology, cultural studies, sociology, and communication studies, providing a multidimensional perspective on propaganda's functioning. Research findings reveal that effective propaganda operates as a system of rational, structured, goal-oriented processes designed to influence public opinion and achieve political objectives. Key findings reveal that propaganda technologies are institutionalized systems, distinct from sporadic techniques, and are characterized by their universality, reusability, and context-specific adaptability. For instance, cognitive distortions and emotional triggers serve as operational mechanisms in psychological propaganda, while symbols, myths, and rituals dominate cultural propaganda. Communicative technologies, such as framing and agenda-setting, leverage mass media and digital platforms to shape public discourse. The study concludes that the technological approach is uniquely positioned to synthesize interdisciplinary insights, offering a practice-oriented lens to analyze and counteract propaganda. Its integrative methodology underscores propaganda's role in constructing alternative realities, legitimizing power, and fostering social consensus. The findings have significant implications for media literacy, critical thinking, and democratic resilience, particularly in the face of escalating information and psychological operations in international relations. By examining the technological core of propaganda, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of security, public diplomacy, and the ethical challenges of digital diplomacy in the 21st century.

Keywords: *methodology, propaganda, political science, disinformation, symbols, security, international relations, public diplomacy, digital diplomacy, information and psychological operations.*

Propaganda operates covertly—or more precisely, imperceptibly—to the public. Once it becomes the object of reflection, it loses its spellbinding power. Its strength lies in its elusiveness. Paradoxically, one may constantly encounter propaganda and yet not perceive it. This is the effect described by the fabulist Ivan Krylov in his fable *Is the Sightseer*, in which a visitor to the *Kunstkamera*, absorbed in scrutinizing the details, fails to notice the elephant in the room [17, p.132].

In two previous articles devoted to the subject of propaganda [5; 32], we have already described it as the unseen elephant, though from a slightly different angle. One can sense propaganda, but cannot escape it. However, one can freely choose the kind of propaganda one aligns with—one can become part of it in order to resist hostile propaganda. This is likely what Jacques Ellul had in mind when developing his theory of total

propaganda [11]. Herein lies the secret of its effectiveness. Yet, propaganda's invisibility is merely a prerequisite for its capacity to steer thought and behavior. What fundamentally ensures the effectiveness of propaganda are its technologies, which allow it to fulfill its objectives with minimal expenditure of resources. Identifying and analyzing these technologies is most effectively accomplished through the technological approach—a methodological lens that enables one to discern the technological dimensions of social reality. This analytical capacity makes the technological approach a highly relevant methodological tool for studying propaganda. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to explore the heuristic potential and specificity of the technological approach as applied to uncovering the essence and operative principles of political propaganda.

Review of Previous Research and Publications. One of the founding figures of the technological approach—not only in its application to technical practices but also to politics and social relations—was Johann Beckmann. Beginning in 1772, he taught a course titled “Technology” in Göttingen, and in 1777, he published *Anleitung zur Technologie* (Guide to Technology), in which the term technology was first introduced in the context of social relations. In this work, he examined practices, principles, and consequences not merely as a set of technical solutions, but as a social process [27, p.118].

A more explicit application of the technological approach to political propaganda began in 1927 with the publication of Harold Lasswell's *Propaganda Technique in the World War*. Lasswell defined mass propaganda as a new “hammer and anvil of social solidarity,” a modern force capable of fusing millions of individuals into a single “amalgamated mass of hatred, will, and hope” [18, pp. 221–222]. Describing propaganda as “the control of public opinion through the manipulation of significant symbols,” Lasswell argued that its purpose is to mobilize and consolidate the masses around a single goal (such as victory in war). Notably, this mobilization is predominantly negative in nature: it is collective hatred for a common enemy that unites the masses and becomes the chief motivator in pursuing the shared objective. Lasswell stressed that this objective must appear both universal and uniquely relevant to each social group. The propagandist, to ensure the enthusiastic participation of all, must be able to transform the war against the enemy “into a march toward that promised land which seems most appealing to each of the interested groups” [18, p.76].

Technological interpretations of propaganda also appear in Leonard W. Doob's 1935 book *Propaganda: Its Psychology and Technique* [10].

The development of propaganda techniques was significantly advanced by the Institute for Propaganda Analysis, which operated in the United States from 1937 to 1942 [31]. The Institute identified seven primary propaganda techniques: (1) Name-calling; (2) Glittering generalities (essentially metaphorization or framing); (3) Transfer (associating prestige or respectability with something dubious); (4) Testimonial; (5) Plain folks (appealing to the common person's approval); (6) Card stacking (selectively presenting facts to support an assertion); (7) Bandwagon (evoking the herd instinct, suggesting that everyone in the target group shares the propagandist's view) [31, pp. 23–25].

Aldous Huxley also contributed to the formation of the technological approach to propaganda. He identified three main propaganda techniques: repetition, suppression, and rationalization [14, p.348]. The propagandist repeats statements to ensure they are accepted as truth, withholds information that ought to be ignored, and provokes and rationalizes emotions to serve the interests of the party or state [14, p.348].

Jacques Ellul laid a comprehensive theoretical foundation for the technological approach to political propaganda. In *The Technological Society*, he wrote: “Technology as a concept allows us to perceive a range of phenomena that remain invisible even where technologies are clearly present” [12, p.23]. For Ellul, the key characteristic of technology is its efficiency: Technology is “the ensemble of the absolutely most efficient means at a given moment.” [12, p.26]. “Wherever there is research and application of new means as a criterion of efficiency, one can say that there is a technology” [12, p.26]. According to Ellul, technology is autonomous, systemic, inclusive, and total. It increasingly becomes a universal intermediary between the individual and their natural, technical, and even social environment, allowing people to achieve what they otherwise could not on their own [12, p.34]. Everything—from interpersonal relationships to pedagogy, politics, and communication—is, in Ellul's view, subject to technological analysis and transformation, in accordance with the human drive to act effectively in pursuit of personal goals [12, p.35].

Ellul argued that even democratic societies—and their citizens—cannot do without the informational and psychological control technologies used to shape public opinion. Citizens themselves, he asserted, often welcome propaganda to simplify their political choices [12, pp. 58–59]. In a world where decisions are made and power is exercised by individuals acting as operators of technology, the individual remains fully capable of choosing, deciding, changing, and directing... but always within the framework of the technological structure and through the development of technology itself [12, p.325].

Ellul characterized propaganda as a core attribute of national social and political life—a permanent, ubiquitous practice of mass persuasion governed by the technological imperative of efficiency. “Ineffective propaganda is no propaganda,” he declared [11, p.X]. In its broadest sense, modern propaganda encompasses psychological operations (shaping opinions through purely psychological means), psychological warfare (demoralizing the enemy to undermine their beliefs and actions), brainwashing (complex methods of converting adversaries into allies), and public relations [11, p.XIII]. In the narrower sense, Ellul defined propaganda as a combination of psychological influence techniques with methods of organizing and mobilizing human activity [11, p.XIII]. He elaborated on orthopraxy—the application of correct practice—as the technological mechanism underpinning effective modern propaganda.

Methodology. At the core of the methodological framework for understanding the technological approach to propaganda lie, above all, the axiomatic method, the hypothetico-deductive method, and the method of ascending from the abstract to the concrete.

The axiomatic method was employed to formulate foundational principles essential for conceptualizing propaganda as a system. The axioms include such fundamental propositions as: ineffective propaganda is not propaganda; propaganda operates through concealment; the power of propaganda lies in its elusiveness.

The hypothetico-deductive method enabled the formulation of hypotheses concerning the nature and effectiveness of propaganda technologies, from which specific consequences and applications were derived. For example, the hypothesis that propaganda technologies are effective, integrated systems of methods leads to conclusions about their constituent elements: procedures, resource potential, operational horizon, and strategic intent. This method is reflected in the study of cognitive distortions as operational mechanisms of psychological propaganda technologies, where hypotheses about human perception give rise to specific propaganda techniques.

The technological approach, in essence, illustrates the method of ascending from the abstract to the concrete—beginning with the abstract concept of technology and systematically applying it to the specific context of political propaganda. Moreover, the integrative nature of the technological approach—which combines ideological, psychological, cultural, and communicative dimensions—represents a synthesis of abstract theories into a comprehensive and concrete methodology for analyzing and understanding political propaganda.

Research Findings. The Essence of the Technological Approach. The technological approach to political propaganda is a methodological concept that conceives of propaganda as a system of rational, structured, and goal-oriented processes designed to influence public opinion, shape behavior, and achieve political objectives. This approach is rooted in a broader understanding of technology as the systematic application of knowledge—scientific, technical, or social—to meet needs, fulfill desires, or implement social and political strategies. In this context, propaganda technologies are not merely tools; they are efficient, integrated systems of techniques, symbols, and methods that, by manipulating perception, stirring emotions, and implanting ideas into the mass consciousness, can steer the thinking and behavior of social and political actors.

Through the lens of the technological approach, propaganda is best understood as a system of strategically deployed technologies of varying effectiveness that serve to acquire, exercise, and legitimize political power by generating political legitimacy and fostering social consensus. This approach not only allows for the identification of specific technologies but also provides a methodological foundation for analyzing their components: the subjects and objects of application, principles and operational algorithms, mechanisms of influence, procedures and methods, resource potential, operational horizon, and strategic intent.

Compared to other methodological approaches—such as normative or descriptive ones—the technological approach offers several key advantages. First, it views propaganda as a system of effective practices that can be studied, optimized, and predicted. Second, it is practice-oriented, focusing on specific propaganda tools and the outcomes of their use. Third, it is integrative, incorporating insights from other disciplines and approaches: political science (theories of power and legitimacy), psychology (mechanisms of persuasion and emotion regulation), cultural studies (symbols and rituals), sociology (public opinion, norms, values, social roles, identity), and communication studies (framing, priming, agenda-setting). Fourth, it is adaptive, capable of accounting for changes in society and technology. Fifth, it is effectiveness-oriented, emphasizing the development of criteria for assessing not only the content of propaganda but also its impact on audiences. Sixth, it is grounded in the principle of systemacity, which entails analyzing propaganda as a set of interrelated elements, its functional mechanisms, effectiveness, and adaptability to social conditions. Seventh, it is highly contextualized, taking into account the historical, cultural, and political conditions under which propaganda is conducted. Eighth, it is reflexive, acknowledging the reciprocal influence between the subject and object of

propaganda. Ninth, it maintains ethical neutrality, focusing on the mechanisms of propaganda without making moral judgments about them.

The technological approach reveals propaganda as a highly controlled process, in which every element—from symbols to social media—is part of an influence algorithm. Its application enables not only the analysis but also the counteraction of manipulative tactics, thereby enhancing societal awareness. As such, the technological approach to political propaganda is not merely a research tool—it is an essential component of media literacy, critical thinking, and the defense of democracy.

Propaganda Technology as a Research Focus of the Technological Approach. Broadly defined, propaganda technology refers to any effective practice or method used to achieve specific political goals by exerting a transformative influence on public opinion and behavior.

In the context of propaganda, technology implies the systematic application of rational knowledge and methods for the development, dissemination, and management of persuasive messages. It encompasses both material instruments (e.g., media platforms, algorithms, data analytics) and intangible processes (e.g., emotional appeals, symbolic manipulation, narrative framing). Propaganda technologies extend beyond physical tools to include intellectual and organizational frameworks that enable the creation and implementation of ideological content.

Structurally, any technology consists of a set of procedures, techniques, and modes of action applied in sequence to achieve the optimal and effective realization of an actor's goals at a particular time and in a specific context. Scholars of political technologies typically identify three core components:

1. Technological knowledge, which includes the insights of various actors: the technologist (who analyzes political events and processes), the client (who defines specific objectives), and the executor (who determines how best to apply relevant procedures, techniques, and methods of influence);
2. Procedures, techniques, and methodologies of action, which must be applied in combination and tailored to the particularities of the political event and its surrounding conditions;
3. Technical and resource support.

When applied to propaganda technologies, the producers of technological knowledge may include specialized units within governmental institutions engaged in propaganda activities (such as Ukraine's the Ministry of Culture and Strategic Communications), as well as movement leaders and political technologists who are tasked with the effective deployment of persuasive strategies. What distinguishes propaganda actors from other political participants is their ability to consciously initiate, direct, and terminate the process of political mobilization.

The second element—procedures, techniques, and methods of propaganda influence—also possesses distinct characteristics. These technologies, aimed at implanting desired stereotypes, templates, opinions, and representations into the mass consciousness, strive to consolidate a sense of psychological unity. They may incorporate various types of messaging, including advertising or entertainment. At the core of such technologies lies the creation of cognitive schemas, which enable the imposition of a particular interpretation of events. The main function of propaganda content is to convey visions of political reality that orient audiences toward specific courses of action.

Cognitive and communicative propaganda technologies are closely interconnected. Cognitive technologies explain how target audiences process information about reality to generate desired emotional states and interpretations. Communicative technologies, by contrast, define the most effective means of transmitting mobilizing messages into the information space.

A key feature of communicative propaganda technologies is their universality and reusability, which ensure their presence across all channels of mass communication—both in traditional media and in the digital sphere.

The third structural element of propaganda technologies is resources. The agents of political propaganda may include the state, political parties and movements, civil society organizations, and opinion leaders—but all of them must possess some form of power resource in order to exert influence on the objects of propaganda. These resources can take many forms, ranging from control over information channels to access to armed forces.

The typology of propaganda technologies can also vary widely, depending on the chosen criteria. For example, based on the “mode of action,” one may distinguish between direct and indirect influence technologies. In the former case, the propaganda subject engages with the target audience through mass events—rallies, demonstrations, pickets, assemblies, concerts, and so on. The value of such interaction lies in fostering a sense of personal involvement in socially significant goals and the perception of individual agency in influencing social dynamics. In the latter case, the presence of an intermediary is essential. This role may be played by various social actors—mass media, opinion leaders, NGOs—as well as other tools of mass

communication (e.g., billboards, flyers, posters, booklets, essays, books, albums, programs, brochures).

A critical issue in propaganda theory is the relationship between propaganda techniques and technologies. Techniques are typically understood as rhetorical-psychological tricks or tactics. They are applied situationally and sporadically and tend to have only temporary effects. Technologies, by contrast, are institutional in nature: they operate continuously and are rooted in established mechanisms of propaganda. For instance, the well-known mythological mechanism of world dualization—dividing reality into binary opposites such as good vs. evil, black vs. white, friend vs. foe—exemplifies this. If a propaganda technique simply points to a scapegoat for a problem, proposes a solution, and elicits a reaction (e.g., during an election), a propaganda technology constructs an ideology, a symbolic system, and a vision of role dynamics involving enemies, allies, and their respective supporters. As a result, propaganda technologies create an alternative imagined reality. Their influence lies in constructing a distinct symbolic world.

Consider, for example, the technology of image-making. This is not merely about crafting a politician's image around an appealing archetype—it is about constructing a narrative through imagery, offering the recipient a lens through which to perceive the political world. It is the art of expression through the formation and evolution of symbolic representations. Unlike techniques, which deceive, point, or symbolize, technologies shape consciousness and behavior in accordance with the propagandist's aims. Or take the technology of “soft power”—a strategy of seduction, of winning allies and friends, aimed at achieving a sustainable and long-term impact.

Finally, it is worth noting that propaganda technologies may be universal, effective in virtually any context, or specific, suited only to particular situations—such as wartime, elections, or periods of rising public discontent.

The Technological Approach as an Integrative Methodology. An analysis of global perspectives on the understanding, study, and application of propaganda—based on the criterion of the primary means of propagandistic influence—allows us to distinguish five major approaches to its conceptualization: ideological, psychological, cultural, communicative, and technological. Each of these approaches possesses its own heuristic advantages. However, only the technological approach is practice-oriented and aimed at transforming political reality. It understands propaganda as a system of effective practices, designed with clear objectives and operative mechanisms for generating specific political actions to achieve societal consensus in the interests of certain political forces.

Depending on the resources that propaganda mobilizes to accomplish its goals and the particular nature of its mechanisms of influence, we can identify ideological, psychological, cultural, and communicative propaganda technologies. Accordingly, the technological approach cannot be applied in isolation—it requires the integration of the ideological, psychological, cultural, and communicative approaches. For instance, it is through the joint application of the communicative and technological approaches that communicative propaganda technologies are delineated; similarly, combining the psychological and technological approaches allows for the conceptualization of psychological propaganda technologies. This interdependence positions the technological approach as an integrative methodology, one that synthesizes the ideological, psychological, cultural, and communicative dimensions. Let us examine each of these in more detail.

Since propaganda has traditionally been associated with the dissemination of ideas, we begin with the ideological approach. Its proponents—Vladimir Lenin, Georgi Plekhanov, Stuart Campbell, Philip Taylor, Katka Selucky, David Brandenberger, Julius Klanfer, Won Yong Jang, N.Burnett, Massimo Leone, Miyume Tanji, and Daniel Broudy—emphasize the power of ideas in influencing society as a whole and political actors in particular. For these thinkers, propaganda is essentially an attempt to persuade individuals to adopt a specific ideological doctrine or belief system.

One of the most notable figures representing this approach is Philip Taylor. As he puts it, propaganda is “really no more than the communication of ideas designed to persuade people to think and behave in a desired way. Propaganda aims to convince people to do things that benefit the persuader—either directly or indirectly” [30, p.6]. Taylor emphasizes that this does not mean compelling people to fight is inherently right, but rather that propaganda plays a central role in persuading them to risk their lives for various causes [30, p.6]. Propaganda, he writes, “is simply the process by which an idea or opinion is communicated to someone else for a specific persuasive purpose. Propaganda is an organized process of persuasion” [30, p.9].

Julius Klanfer, likewise, sees propaganda as the rationalization of desires through ideas that provide means for their fulfillment. As he states, propaganda is “a means of showing the individual what his interests are and what resources guarantee the satisfaction of his desires” [16, p.443]. For N.Burnett, propaganda is “discourse in the service of ideology” [8, p.127].

Thus, the ideological approach reduces propaganda to the influence of ideas on consciousness, and through it, on individual and collective behavior. Indeed, ideas possess a certain persuasive power and can grip the masses. Yet ideas alone are not sufficient for effective propaganda. They can be unconvincing or inaccessible to broad audiences. The real-life complexities of society, along with the failures or successes of particular policies, can undermine the force of those ideas. Moreover, ideas require rational engagement, a mode of thinking that may not be prevalent among the general populace, which tends to operate more on emotion and instinct than reason. Additionally, the reception of ideas is filtered through a society's specific sociocultural experiences, which determine the degree of internalization and the capacity for practical application. For these reasons, we may conclude that ideas are not the decisive factor in the success of propaganda.

Ideological propaganda technologies can be defined as the systematic imposition of ideas whose cumulative influence transforms individuals and social groups into obedient instruments of the information-psychological struggle for power. Within these technologies, ideas function as mechanisms for the realization of interests, justifying individuals' most potent desires and offering hope for their rapid fulfillment. These ideas are well-structured representations that stimulate individuals and groups to escape the traumas of reality and satisfy their spiritual and material needs—obstacles to which are framed as various enemies.

The effectiveness of ideological propaganda technologies lies in their focus on the struggle against these enemies. In doing so, they not only shape public opinion but also mobilize the active segments of society in support of one of the competing political camps. As tools of political and social governance, these technologies function by exploiting the human desire to master reality through the internalization of seemingly simple ideas and concepts. All propaganda, by nature, leans toward indoctrination—the implantation of a coherent system of ideas into the mass consciousness, capable of mobilizing a politically active majority toward social transformation and creativity. Here, ideas are instruments for the practical engagement with reality in pursuit of a desired vision of the future.

The main ideological propaganda technologies include:

1. Ideological simplification technology, which distills complex ideas into accessible concepts that resonate with the masses and provide clear solutions to their problems. It reflects the principle of avoiding complex terminology or foreign words in favor of clarity and comprehensibility.
2. Enemy image construction technology, which mobilizes collective action by identifying internal or external enemies as obstacles to the fulfillment of spiritual and material desires. It works by uniting a politically active majority through shared antagonism.
3. Centralized ideological consistency technology, which ensures strict coordination of propaganda efforts under a single authoritative center to maintain message uniformity across platforms and audiences.
4. Embedded propaganda technology, which integrates ideological messaging into everyday life, addressing practical needs such as economic and social issues, thus grounding propaganda in lived experience rather than abstract political rhetoric.
5. Mass re-education technology, which transforms individuals and groups into agents of ideological change by engaging them in political activities and cultivating a sense of responsibility for the future.
6. Adaptive framing (specification) technology, which tailors ideological narratives to diverse audiences based on their psychological profiles, professions, or cultural backgrounds while maintaining overall political coherence.
7. Indoctrinational slogan technology, which uses memorable and emotionally charged slogans to distill complex phenomena into powerful, action-inspiring messages.
8. Iterative renewal technology, which reinforces ideological messages through repeated exposure using new data, examples, and formats to maintain relevance and depth of understanding.
9. Ideologically driven training technology, which recruits and prepares propagandists skilled in effectively conveying ideological messages and adapting their techniques to different contexts and audiences.

Representatives of the cultural approach to propaganda emphasize the significance of myths, symbols, archetypes, and images as core instruments through which a propagandist constructs a desired vision of the world. Among its proponents are Nicholas O'Shaughnessy, Erin Steuter, Deborah Wills, Alex S. Edelstein, Jason Stanley, John Corner, Toby Clark, J. Chapman, Jay W. Baird, and J. Kiper.

For Jason Stanley, propaganda is rooted in ideals—be they aesthetic, health-related, economic, or political [29, p.51]. Political propaganda, he argues, is a type of speech that fully incorporates political, economic, aesthetic, and rational ideals for political purposes. In practice, propaganda either supports or undermines these ideals—this, Stanley contends, is the fundamental distinction between supportive and undermining propaganda [29, p.52].

Cultural determinants play a crucial role in the execution of propaganda, particularly in the manipulation of ideals, myths, images, and symbols. The application of cultural and technological approaches together allows for the identification of cultural propaganda technologies, which may be defined as effective practices that employ symbols, images, archetypes, rituals, ideals, traditions, and historical memory to construct a propagandistic reality conducive to acquiring, exercising, and retaining political power.

These technologies can be categorized into three principal forms:

1. Political mythologization, which serves as a foundational mechanism by establishing symbolic codes, temporal frameworks, and spatial parameters for presenting political authority. It functions as a core pillar of cultural propaganda by creating, disseminating, and sustaining political myths that legitimize or delegitimize regimes, policies, and leaders. It operates by forming supra-individual goals and strategies that channel personal behavior toward collective aims, thus fostering internal political cohesion. Its high effectiveness stems from its capacity to generate emotional energy and moral suggestibility, often catalyzing political movements.

2. Political ritualization, a reproductive technology that actualizes mythic themes within the political process. It immerses individuals in constructed mythic time and space through emotionally charged acts and archetypal symbols, anchoring political myths in mass consciousness. This technology converts political conflict into symbolic events, showcasing social solidarity even in its absence and mitigating societal division through ritualized forms of resolution. It simultaneously assigns individuals roles within a status-order framework shaped by the political myth.

3. Political nominalization, a discursive technology that communicates symbolic codes and themes via verbal and semiotic systems. It influences political discourse through metaphors and suggestive language that shape the political consciousness of both ordinary citizens and elites. Its strength lies in its agility—responding swiftly to unforeseen events, integrating political realities into overarching myths, and framing narrow but decisive alternatives for political decision-making. Rooted in mass communication, it ensures monopolistic control over defining political reality.

Together, these technologies—mythologization, ritualization, and nominalization—operate through distinct mechanisms: mythologization centers on value-based narratives, ritualization on emotional and sensory immersion, and nominalization on linguistic and metaphorical framing. Nonetheless, they all contribute to constructing a propagandistic reality that enables the acquisition, exercise, and maintenance of political power through the strategic deployment of symbols, images, archetypes, rituals, ideals, traditions, and historical memory.

The psychological approach to the study of propaganda was employed by Harold D. Lasswell (prior to the 1940s), A. Ponsonby, William W. Biddle, Leonard W. Doob, Serge Chakotin, Edgar H. Henderson, F. C. Bartlett, R. Money-Kyrle, S. I. Hayakawa, L. Voitasik, Elliot Aronson, Anthony R. Pratkanis, Lynette Finch, Brett Silverstein, Charles A. Fleming, and Donald A. Barclay. This approach is grounded in the manipulation of attitudes, reflexes, emotions, attention, will, and memory, assigning special importance to various forms of manipulation.

The psychological nature of influence was explored by Serge Chakotin, who proposed a model of omnipotent propaganda based on Pavlov's theory of conditioned reflexes in animals. Chakotin identified four primary human reflexes upon which propaganda operates: (1) aggressive, (2) sexual, (3) defensive, and (4) alimentary. In his view, humans are driven not by reason, but by instincts and emotions. For Chakotin, propaganda is the repetitive invocation of slogans that directly target human instincts and feelings. Thus, the communication process was reduced to a unidirectional vector aimed at the masses, who were to be transformed into a "desired public" through the imposition of ideological meanings reinforced by life-embedded reflexes [9, pp. 92–125].

Anthony R. Pratkanis and Marlene E. Turner defined propaganda as "an attempt to move the recipient toward a predetermined point of view by using simple images and slogans that simplify thinking and play upon prejudices and emotions" [25, p. 190].

One branch of the psychological approach is represented by scholars such as Scot Macdonald, Arthur Asa Berger, W. Daugherty, C. Berger, L. Farago, M. Janowitz, H. Kumata, Wilbur Schramm, and R. White, who conceptualize propaganda as a form of psychological warfare or psychological operations. Scot Macdonald notes that "the most common type of psychological operation is propaganda, which is the use of any form of communication to disseminate or reinforce certain beliefs for political purposes" [23, p. 32]. According to him, the most effective propaganda combines entertainment, education, and persuasion. Entertainment elements attract the audience, while the educational aspect reduces the perception that the message is propagandistic—even when it is explicitly persuasive. Unlike education, which strives to present an objective viewpoint,

propaganda works through the selective use of facts—though the differences are often subtle. Sometimes, the distinction between propaganda and education is merely a matter of hindsight: if a persuasive attempt fails, it is called propaganda; if it succeeds, it is called education [23, p. 32].

The psychological approach to propaganda emphasizes the role of irrational factors in propagandistic influence on society, attributing to them a determining role in shaping modes and patterns of thought, information perception, and social behavior.

The simultaneous application of psychological and technological approaches to propaganda makes it possible to identify psychological technologies of propaganda, which serve as effective tools for influencing the mental and emotional spheres of individuals and social groups in pursuit of political power. These technologies utilize cognitive distortions and emotional triggers to shape perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors in ways that align with the propagandist's objectives.

One of the leading psychological propaganda technologies used in developed societies is the technology of democratic propaganda, which relies on the cognitive distortion known as the illusion of control. Politicians commonly exploit this technique to convince voters that society can control the government through elections. Another propaganda technique, the appeal to majority opinion, or its variant—the appeal to the opinion of the people—exploits the herd instinct, shaping individual thought and behavior through imagined, symbolic, or actual group pressure.

The justification of past choices technology draws on cognitive dissonance, encouraging individuals to rationalize prior decisions—such as support for a specific politician—by attributing their current dissatisfaction to external factors, such as interference from opponents or unfulfilled promises. This helps solidify loyalty while softening regret or disappointment. The technologies of optimism and pessimism, respectively, work to increase public trust in the initiatives of the ruling regime and undermine confidence in the opposition, further polarizing public sentiment. Historical revisionism and wishful thinking are used to reframe past events or present an imagined future as an established fact, blurring the boundary between fiction and reality [3, p. 7].

Among psychological propaganda technologies, special attention should be given to the technology of political mocking (mocking politics), which manipulates with a false object in order to alter the symbolic or real order of things. The propagandist's main task is to construct a mock object by exploiting institutional gaps in the socio-political structure. Initially produced as a symbolic construct, the mock object eventually yields real consequences by actualizing dormant unconscious desires and needs of significant social groups and reclassifying them as articulated interests. These interests are then realized in the imaginary order of things as a process of implementing an idealized future.

Importantly, the mock object is not created to regulate these needs and desires institutionally, but rather to subordinate both the imaginary and real political orders to its logic. In doing so, it enables a restructuring of power dynamics and a rebalancing of authority among political actors. As a result of the implementation of political mocking, the power of some agents is strengthened, while that of others is weakened [2, p. 11].

The effectiveness of psychological propaganda technologies largely depends on cognitive distortions, which function as their operational mechanisms. Propaganda acts both by initiating such distortions (illusions) and by activating them to effectively influence the target audience [3, p. 8].

The communicative approach to propaganda has been employed by Edward Bernays, Harold D. Lasswell (since the 1940s), Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Robert K. Merton, Walter Lippmann, Dennis Rohatyn, Garth S. Jowett, Victoria O'Donnell, David Miller, William Dinan, Evonne Levy, Susan A. Brewer, Mark D. Alleyne, J. Michael Sproule, Jennifer Roe Hardin, Stanley B. Cunningham, R. Marlin, J. William Albright, Linda Risso, A. Udelepp, G. Sjoblom, R. M. Entman, Jay Black, Noam Chomsky, and Heorhii Pocheptsov.

The communicative approach to propaganda was initiated by Harold D. Lasswell. He demonstrated the pivotal role of mass communication processes in the implementation of propaganda by developing and publishing his now-classic article, "The Structure and Function of Communication in Society" [19], where he introduced a five-stage model of communication. According to Lasswell, mass communication is a goal-oriented process whereby a communicator influences a target audience through carefully crafted messages. This influence is transmitted via mass media, whose audiences consist of isolated individuals lacking horizontal social ties. They consume propaganda individually through vertical, one-way communication channels, which results in diminished critical perception and renders propaganda more effective in shaping public consciousness. In this process, the propagandist acts as the initiator of political communication—a subject of communicative governance who, through propaganda, influences mass preferences by using symbols that carry significant meaning for the target audience [19, pp. 37–38].

Carl Hovland conducted research at Yale University into the effects of films on the attitudes and beliefs of

American soldiers during World War II. He later expanded his studies to the influence of mass media on public opinion. Through controlled experiments, he examined changes in soldiers' motivation after viewing instructional or propaganda films. The results revealed that these films did not enhance soldiers' motivation. Hovland developed what came to be known as the Yale Model of Communication, which posits that changing an individual's attitude necessarily involves a transformation of their beliefs. Drawing on Lasswell's cognitive paradigm, Hovland constructed an information processing model involving a source, message, audience, and audience response. For communication to be effective, he argued, the message must be noticed, understood, accepted, and remembered—though these stages occur unevenly. Memory retention follows an initial phase of rapid forgetting, which then gradually slows [28, p. 104].

Importantly, Hovland and his colleagues discovered the effectiveness of two-sided (dialogic) propaganda in cases where the audience initially disagrees with the communicator's message [13, pp. 201–227].

Within the communicative framework, American sociologist Paul F. Lazarsfeld viewed society as an object of informational influence. By developing the two-step flow model of communication, Lazarsfeld demonstrated that mass media do not communicate with society directly. Due to the heterogeneity of social structures and the presence of influential opinion leaders, media messages are interpreted by these intermediaries, who serve as the primary recipients of mass media influence. These leaders then disseminate the interpreted meanings, judgments, and opinions to their own audiences [20, p. 179].

Walter Lippmann made a significant contribution to understanding the communicative dimension of propaganda. In his seminal work *Public Opinion* [22], he argued that stereotypes substitute political reality in the public consciousness, and that the media play a crucial role in shaping these stereotypes. These stereotypes are built on superficial knowledge and judgments formed through the consumption of mass-mediated information [22, p. 30]. Consequently, mass communication constructs a political pseudo-environment with which public consciousness interacts—a consciousness that is, in most cases, incapable of independently discerning objective reality.

A particularly productive treatment of propaganda within the communicative paradigm can be found in the work of Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell [15]. In their book *Propaganda and Persuasion*, they examine propaganda as a form of communication: “We seek to understand and analyze propaganda by identifying its characteristics and to place it within communication studies to examine the qualities of context, sender, intent, message, channel, audience, and response. Furthermore, we want to clarify, as much as possible, the distinction between propaganda and persuasion by examining propaganda as a subcategory of persuasion, as well as information. Our definition of propaganda focuses on the communication process—most specifically, on the purpose of the process: Propaganda is the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist.” [15, p. 7].

Evonne Levy linked propaganda to rhetoric. In her view, all propaganda is a form of rhetoric because it aims to persuade—but not all rhetoric qualifies as propaganda [21, p. 66].

David Miller and William Dinan, also working within the communicative approach, defined propaganda as the integration of communication and action. For them, propaganda is communication with a purpose—a project of designing and manufacturing consent [24, p. 5].

Linda Risso regarded propaganda as a term encompassing a wide range of persuasive communication forms, media, techniques, and target audiences [26, p. 9]. For Jay Black, propaganda is a type of communication designed to narrow evaluative judgment in recipients [7, p. 133].

The communicative approach remains one of the most prevalent perspectives on propaganda. This is largely due to the dramatic expansion of propaganda's capabilities enabled by new communication technologies. Today, the power of propaganda depends to a great extent on who has access to the most influential means of disseminating information. However, the ineffective or technically unsophisticated use of these tools significantly reduces a propagandist's chances of success in an increasingly competitive information environment.

A synthesis of the communicative and technological approaches allows for the identification of communicative propaganda technologies—systematized methods and tools aimed at influencing perceptions through communication, with the goal of shaping desired interpretations of political reality and achieving specific political outcomes. These technologies rely on the transmission of meanings, symbols, and messages capable of altering audience attitudes, motivations, and behaviors.

Key communicative propaganda technologies include: (1) Direct influence technologies, involving immediate interaction with audiences via rallies, demonstrations, public speeches, or personal contacts. (2)

Mediated influence technologies, based on the use of media intermediaries such as mass media, social networks, and opinion leaders. (3) Empathic communication technologies, which emphasize understanding the needs and emotions of the audience and building trust through demonstrations of empathy. (4) Framing, which involves presenting information within a specific context or frame that influences interpretation. (5) Priming, which prepares audiences for certain associations or automatic responses through repeated exposure to key words, images, or narratives. (6) Agenda-setting, which shapes public attention by introducing specific topics into public discourse and thus influencing not only how people think, but what they think about. (7) Cinematic propaganda technologies, which constitute a distinct category of effective practices for constructing propaganda-driven realities in the interests of particular political forces [6]. (8) Digital diplomacy technologies, which function as tools of international propaganda. These include communicative propaganda strategies grounded in informational, evaluative, and argumentative tactics—such as the distortion of information using unverified claims, defamation, and positive representation techniques [1, p. 57; 4].

Conclusions. The essence of the technological approach to political propaganda lies in its conceptualization of propaganda as a system of rational, structured, and goal-oriented processes designed to influence public opinion, shape behavior, and achieve political objectives. This approach views propaganda through the lens of technology, understanding it as the systematic application of knowledge—whether scientific, technical, or social—to meet needs, fulfill desires, or implement strategies. Propaganda technologies are not mere tools but efficient, integrated systems of techniques, symbols, and methods that manipulate perception, stir emotions, and implant ideas into mass consciousness, thereby steering the thinking and behavior of social and political actors. Through this framework, propaganda is seen as a collection of strategically deployed technologies that acquire, exercise, and legitimize political power by generating legitimacy and fostering social consensus.

The specificity of the technological approach in clarifying the essence and operative principles of effective political propaganda lies in its ability to dissect and analyze the components of propaganda as a system. It provides a methodological foundation for examining the subjects and objects of propaganda, its principles and operational algorithms, mechanisms of influence, procedures and methods, resource potential, operational horizon, and strategic intent. Unlike normative or descriptive approaches, the technological approach is practice-oriented, focusing on specific propaganda tools and their outcomes. It integrates insights from multiple disciplines such as political science, psychology, cultural studies, sociology, and communication studies, making it adaptive to societal and technological changes. Its effectiveness-oriented nature emphasizes developing criteria to assess both the content of propaganda and its impact on audiences. Furthermore, it operates on the principle of systemacity, analyzing propaganda as an interconnected set of elements, and remains highly contextualized, accounting for historical, cultural, and political conditions while maintaining ethical neutrality.

Political propaganda technology, as a research focus of the technological approach, refers to any effective practice or method used to achieve specific political goals by exerting transformative influence on public opinion and behavior. These technologies encompass both material instruments like media platforms, algorithms, and data analytics, as well as intangible processes such as emotional appeals, symbolic manipulation, and narrative framing. Structurally, propaganda technologies consist of procedures, techniques, and modes of action applied sequentially to realize an actor's goals within a specific context. The producers of technological knowledge include governmental institutions, movement leaders, and political technologists who consciously initiate, direct, and terminate processes of political mobilization. Procedures and methods of propaganda, aimed at implanting desired stereotypes and representations into mass consciousness, strive to consolidate psychological unity through messaging that ranges from advertising to entertainment. Cognitive and communicative propaganda technologies are closely intertwined, with the former explaining how audiences process information and the latter defining the most effective means of transmitting mobilizing messages.

The specificity of the technological approach as an integrative methodology lies in its synthesis of ideological, psychological, cultural, and communicative dimensions. By combining these perspectives, the technological approach reveals propaganda as a highly controlled process where every element—from symbols to social media—is part of an influence algorithm. It allows for the identification and counteraction of manipulative tactics, enhancing societal awareness. For instance, the ideological dimension focuses on the systematic imposition of ideas that transform individuals into instruments of information-psychological struggle, while the cultural dimension emphasizes myths, symbols, and rituals as core instruments for constructing desired realities. The psychological dimension explores cognitive distortions and emotional triggers that shape perceptions and behaviors, and the communicative dimension examines the transmission of

meanings and messages through media channels. Together, these dimensions create a comprehensive methodology for analyzing and understanding political propaganda, making the technological approach not merely a research tool but an essential component of media literacy, critical thinking, and the defense of democracy.

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Висоцький О. Ю., Павлов Д.М. Як помітити слона?: технологічний підхід як методологічна основа дослідження політичної пропаганди

Дослідження розглядає технологічний підхід як методологічну основу аналізу політичної пропаганди, підкреслюючи її зростаючу актуальність у сучасному інформаційному середовищі. Метою дослідження є вивчення евристичного потенціалу технологічного підходу в розкритті сутності та принципів функціонування політичної пропаганди, зокрема, увага зосереджується на тому, як вона формує громадську думку та поведінку за допомогою складних технологічних засобів. Методологія використовує інтегративну структуру, що поєднує аксіоматичний, гіпотетико-дедуктивний та метод сходження від абстрактного до конкретного. Технологічний підхід інтегрує знання з політології, психології, культурології, соціології та комунікативістики, забезпечуючи багатовимірний погляд на функціонування пропаганди. Дослідження показує, що ефективна пропаганда діє як система раціональних, структурованих, цілеспрямованих процесів, покликаних впливати на громадську думку та досягати політичних цілей. Основні результати демонструють, що пропагандистські технології є інституціоналізованими системами, відмінними від спорадичних прийомів, і характеризуються універсальністю, можливістю багаторазового використання та адаптивністю до конкретного контексту. Наприклад, когнітивні викривлення та емоційні тригери слугують операційними механізмами в психологічній пропаганді, тоді як символи, міфи та ритуали домінують у культурній пропаганді. Комунікативні технології, такі як фреймінг і формування порядку денного, використовують засоби масової інформації та цифрові платформи для формування публічного дискурсу. У дослідженні зроблено висновок, що технологічний підхід має унікальну можливість синтезувати міждисциплінарні знання, пропонуючи практично-орієнтовану призму для аналізу та протидії пропаганді. Його інтегративна методологія підкреслює роль пропаганди в конструюванні альтернативних реальностей, легітимації влади та сприянні суспільному консенсусу. Результати дослідження мають важливе значення для медіаграмотності, критичного мислення та демократичної стійкості, особливо в умовах ескалації інформаційно-психологічних операцій у міжнародних відносинах. Вивчаючи технологічне ядро пропаганди, дослідження сприяє глибшому розумінню безпеки, публічної дипломатії та етичних викликів цифрової дипломатії у XXI столітті.

Ключові слова: методологія, пропаганда, політична наука, дезінформація, символи, безпека, міжнародні відносини, публічна дипломатія, цифрова дипломатія, інформаційно-психологічні операції.