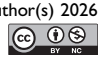
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Toward an Interdisciplinary Model of Organized, Psychology-Based Persuasive Communication: Expanding Critical Propaganda Studies

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Abstract

This article responds to recent calls to expand political communication research through renewed engagement with propaganda studies. It addresses two related challenges: the need for a deeper understanding of organized, manipulative communication in liberal democracies and the need for terminological clarification in its analysis. The article develops the analytical category of Organized Psychology-based, Persuasive Communication (OPPC) that provides a framework for the examination of the deliberate use of soft-power-techniques within organized, persuasive communication. The interdisciplinary OPPC model used to illustrate the analytical category of OPPC includes five key elements of the communicative process (transmitter, receiver, process, effects, and feedback loop) and adds a psychological layer by distinguishing between inner-, and extrapsychological aspects and by integrating the inner-psychological process of information processing into the communicative framework. Furthermore, it embeds the individuals within their social, historical, and cultural contexts. The model is intended as a medium-level analytical framework and starting point for future empirical research rather than as a complete account of psychological mechanisms. Its contribution is to provide a clearer conceptual and interdisciplinary

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basis for analyzing the construction, dissemination, processing and effects of organized persuasive communication.

Keywords
propaganda studies, political communication, soft power, organized persuasive communication, critical sociology

Introduction

This article answers the call for the expansion of the field of political communication with propaganda studies (Robinson, 2019) by developing a framework that helps us understand how organized persuasive communication operates, which are considered to be a blind spot in liberal democracies (Bakir et al., 2019). Its main contribution is to use the concept of Organized, Psychology-based Persuasive Communication (OPPC) as the structural foundation for examining practices that deliberately exploit vulnerabilities of the human psyche through communicative processes. These practices are conventionally discussed under a multitude of different expressions (Robinson, 2019; Taylor, 2002; Xifra, 2019), which makes a deeper understanding more difficult and leads to the need for further clarification of its key terms (Baines et al., 2019; Bakir et al., 2019; Ellul, 1965; Taylor, 2002). The model that is developed in this paper is designed to make the psychological mechanisms and the communicative structure of the application of such practices more visible and provide a framework for future research.

The paper is divided into four main sections.

First, it will address the terminology surrounding the concept of propaganda and work out a common, psychological denominator that most of the different concepts described by these different terms share: *soft power* (Nye, 2004). The use of this unifying concept in a propaganda setting will be defined by the term OPPC.

Second, the article lays out several existing propaganda-, public-relations and (political-) communication models and approaches to work out what these models leave open to further research (Bakir et al., 2019; Robinson, 2019). It will show that the different, existing models to some degree lack a framework for a holistic approach that connects and incorporates both the psychological processes such as cognition, motivation, and emotion as well as communicative conditions such as the transmitter or the social context.

Third, the paper presents an interdisciplinary OPPC model that integrates different theories and concepts such as transmitter, receiver, message, communicative processes, different messages, inner- and extra-psychological aspects of information-processing, the different contexts into which the individual is embedded, the effects of OPPC and feedback.

Fourth, it discusses the model's scope and limitations and how it can serve as a basis for future research, including empirical research.

Unclear Terminology

The first problem that arises when studying propaganda is a "definitional obfuscation" (Moloney & McGrath, 2020, p. 3) of the term itself: Harlow (1976, 1977) observes as many as 472 definitions of public relations. Its practices appear today under many different labels, such as *public* or *human relations* (Bernays, 1928; Butterick, 2011; Ellul, 1965; Grunig & Hunt, 1984), *political communication* or simply *communication (research)* (Miller & Robinson, 2019; Robinson, 2019; Simpson, 1994), *strategic communication* (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2014), *psychological warfare* or *cognitive warfare* (Claverie et al., 2022; Qualter, 2020; Simpson, 1994), *cultural diplomacy* (Canales, 2023; Zamorano, 2016), *public diplomacy* (Parry & Kornbluh, 1988), *persuasive communication* (Moloney and McGrath, 2020) and many more. Taylor (2002) claims that the multitude of these terms serves to obfuscate the fact that the practice described by them is at heart *propaganda*, stating that "an entire euphemism industry has developed to deflect attention away from the realities of what is being done" (Taylor, 2002, p. 20). He mentions terms like "spin doctoring" and "public affairs" at the political level or "international information" or "strategic influence" at the diplomatic level and "information operations" and "perception management" at the military level (Taylor, 2002, p. 20). Volkoff (1986, 2007) adds the term "disinformation" as another important concept. Taylor points out that a "euphemism game" is being played around the use of propaganda in democracies, which obfuscates the fact that propaganda is being conducted in democracies despite constant affirmations of the contrary (Taylor, 2002, p. 20).

Instead of trying to play along the 'euphemism game' or discussing the extent to which "current mainstream literature on persuasion and 'PR' sanitizes persuasive communication in a way that obfuscates manipulative persuasion" (Robinson, 2019, p. 7), this article starts out by finding a unifying common denominator which all the abovementioned terms share. It focuses hereby on an aspect deliberately left out by Ellul (1965, p. xiii): "the psychological foundations of propaganda." The first question, however, will not be "[on] what prejudices, drives, motivations, passions, complexes, does the propagandist play?" (Ellul, 1965, p. xiii), but *how* this influence is achieved. As Herman and Chomsky argue, propaganda makes use of certain "forms of appeal," for example, "fear, patriotism, economic self-interest" (Herman and Chomsky, 1988, p. 21), and the first pivotal argument of this paper is therefore that the unifying idea set out as a starting point for the analysis of propaganda is the "tricks" used to influence people's "emotions" (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2011).

The terms "forms of appeal" or "tricks" are too vague, though, and they need further clarification. The conceptual bridge proposed in this article is that these words refer to varying degrees to what can be more precisely labelled as the use of *soft-power-techniques* (Nye, 2004). This of course leads to the necessity to define what soft power means. The term was first coined by Joseph Nye (1990), who distinguishes between three ways to affect people's behavior and obtain desired outcomes: coercion, payment and attraction (Nye, 2009). Soft power is defined as "the ability to

get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments" (Nye, 2004, p. x), with power being defined as "the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants" (Nye & Jisi, 2009, p. 18). Hard power is defined by Nye as "the use of coercion or payment" (Nye, 2009, p. 160).

A German handbook of psychology describes soft-power-techniques as "influence strategies that are usually considered offensive and represent forms of manipulation" and notes that such imperceptible influence techniques are particularly effective because they do not generate reactance (Fischer & Wiswede, 2009, p. 615).

This paper uses a very similar definition of soft power in Nye's broader sense and of soft-power-techniques in the narrower sense used by Fischer and Wiswede. In that context, soft-power-techniques refer to imperceptible influence techniques that are applied deliberately in order to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants without generating reactance.

In order to approach the subject of propaganda from a perspective that draws upon the psychological aspects of the phenomenon, this article therefore makes the suggestion that soft power (Kroenig et al., 2010) shall be considered a bridge that transgresses the terminological discussions and that can help to identify the cases in which knowledge about motivation, emotion, cognition, attention, information-processing, etc. is deliberately exploited in the design, dissemination and evaluation of deliberate influence through organized communication (Edney, 2012; Ikenberry & Nye, 2004; Kroenig et al., 2010; Nye, 2017; Surowiec, 2016; Van Herpen, 2015). Different scientific disciplines have contributed to the development of these techniques, including history, sociology, cultural studies and, above all, psychology and communication research, which are the two main disciplines of reference for these soft-power-techniques (Auerbach & Castronovo, 2013; Evans, 2016; Mausfeld, 2018; Robinson, 2019; Simpson, 1994; Tögel, 2020).

This article assumes that what has been described by propaganda scholars as the "application of scientific principles" when engineering people's consent (Bernays, 1947, p. 114) by appealing to implicit concentrations of motive (Lasswell, 1935, p. 527) and the use of unconscious aspects of people's psyche (Ellul, 1965, p. xi), can be regarded in essence as the equivalent of what soft power embodies: a psychology-based approach to influence and gain outcomes from a target audience or individuals (Bernays, 1928; Lippmann, 1922) that focuses on unconscious aspects, e.g., in the decision-making process (e.g., the cognitive bias codex) (Lasswell et al., 1935; Robinson, 2019; Simpson, 1994).

For the deliberate use of soft-power-techniques in a setting of organized, persuasive communication, this paper establishes the analytical category called *Organized, Psychology-Based Persuasive Communication* (OPPC) with the OPPC-model as the visualization of that category. It expands the concept of Organized Persuasive Communication proposed by Bakir et al. (2019) by elaborating on the psychological dimension of organized, persuasive communication: this avoids any controversy surrounding the term "propaganda" and stresses the unifying principle of soft power that all labels and concepts share insofar as they make deliberate use of imperceptible

influence techniques. It is important to point out that not every use of soft power falls under the category of OPPC: People try to influence each other constantly in their daily lives, but the ability to influence one another remains mutual, with both parties having comparable influential power. Furthermore, these efforts are mostly spontaneous and remain on a personal level.

For the deliberate use of soft power to fall under the category of OPPC, a considerable difference in power and/or ability to influence and some form of (institutional) organization have to be present.

OPPC is a broader concept than propaganda and includes it: As Lippmann (1922, p. 26) writes, "what is propaganda, if not the effort to alter the picture to which men respond, to substitute one social pattern for another?." It is this deliberate effort that works through predominantly psychological techniques that still exists today.

Different Propaganda- and PR-Models Lead to the Need for a New Analytical Category: OPPC and the Corresponding OPPC-Model

There are numerous definitions and research approaches to organized persuasive communication (Bernays, 1928; Ellul, 1965; Fondren & Hamilton, 2022; Lasswell et al., 1935; Lippmann, 1922; Miotto, 1953; Richards, 2023; Volkoff, 1986, 2007) as well as numerous propaganda models from different areas of research, notably communication research (Bakir et al., 2019; Simpson, 1994), public relations (Grunig & Hunt, 1984), or media studies (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). Given the amount of research available, not all aspects could be covered and important concepts like the nine laws of (war) propaganda (Fondren & Hamilton, 2022) or the ten "commandments" of propaganda (Morelli, 2001) and many more could not be included in the following analysis.

In the following section, this article will give a selective and not exhaustive review of some of the most influential and recent models. It will identify the elements where the present OPPC-model overlaps with the multitude of already existing models, which parts are retained, modified or combined and also which parts it adds: its most important contribution is the addition of a psychological perspective that is embedded in the communicative framework. This perspective is separated into inner- and extra-psychological elements and it distinguishes between cognition, emotion, motivation and behavior. This opens up a new level of analytical possibilities while maintaining the communicative structure of emitter, receiver, channel and the communicative environment.

Organized Persuasive Communication

One of the most recent publications focuses on a conceptual framework of "organized persuasive communication" (Bakir et al., 2019, p. 311). Its goal is to provide a framework for "all organized persuasion activities" (Bakir et al., 2019, p. 312) and it focuses

on the concepts of "deception, incentivization and coercion" (Bakir et al., 2019, p. 313ff.). The authors criticize that the current practices of organized persuasive communication have not been adequately researched and conceptualized (Bakir et al., 2019, p. 319) and that only limited work has been done so far on this matter (Manheim, 2011). Therefore, they point out that the necessary steps to take now are to "fully define and conceptualize deceptive OPC and incentivizing and coercive OPC in which persuasion operates through physical, socio-political and economic contexts as well as via communication and discourse" (Bakir et al., 2019, p. 319). This article therefore takes up the demand for a definition and conceptualization of OPC and makes the point that the model presented in part three defines and conceptualizes important aspects of OPPC, both from a psychological as well as a communicative point of view.

The PR Concept of Grunig and Hunt (1984)

Grunig and Hunt (1984) propose four different models of what they label as applied social behavioral science (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 5, p. 22ff; Robinson, 1966, p. 7) that serve as an important reference point for the communicative framework. The four models are called: "press agentry/publicity," "public information," "two-way asymmetric," and "two-way symmetric." The "source-message-medium-receiver" model with a feedback-loop going back from the receiver to the source (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 24) presented by Grunig and Hunt serves as an important point of reference for the model in part 3 of this paper.

Several elements of the concept are modified in OPPC:

With regard to Grunig and Hunt's conceptualization, the conceptualization in this paper follows the critique of Moloney, who points out that the four models misrepresent PR because they assume an equal two-way communication process of mutual respect (Moloney, 2006, p. xiii) which has taken the "PR academy into a Neverland of perfection" (Moloney, 2006, p. xiii) and disguised the asymmetric power relationship that is one important element of OPPC (Andrews, 1969; Manheim, 2011; Moloney and McGrath, 2020, p. 9ff; Simons, 1972).

If we follow the assumption of propaganda being a form of communication that is used to dominate others (Simpson, 1994, p. 6), and if we take the word soft "power" at face value, we will also assume that there is a form of asymmetry and difference in power involved in the process of the dissemination of OPPC (Ellul, 1965). Therefore, the concept of OPPC includes the characteristics of asymmetrical, top-down communication that involves a difference in power between the emitter and the receiver of OPPC (cf. Bernays, 1928, 1955; Lasswell, 1935; Simpson, 1994).

The Propaganda-Filter-Model by Chomsky and Herman (1988)

The media analysis by Herman and Chomsky (1988) describes several filters that exist within the media systems of (Western/democratic) nations that lead to "money and

power" being able to "filter out the news fit to print, marginalize dissent, and allow the government and dominant private interests to get their messages across to the public" (Herman and Chomsky, 1988, p. 2). In 2008, the authors stated that a new version of their 1988 model would look similar but that the ideological filter of the free market would have been extended by the war on terror as another dominant, common ideology. Their method relies on "content analysis" and "discourse analysis" (Mullen, 2017, p. 16) and their description of the techniques of propaganda—although still relevant today (Klaehn et al., 2018; Robinson, 2015) —remains limited to descriptions such as the "selection of topics, distribution of concerns, framing of issues, filtering of information, emphasis and tone, and by keeping debate within the bounds of acceptable premises" (Herman and Chomsky, 1988, p. 298), which broadly describes how messages are modified and disseminated through the media. This perspective remains crucial for understanding the communicative processes and the framework within which the media operate. The OPPC model adds another analytical layer and suggests a more detailed look at the use of these techniques from a psychological perspective.

Jacques Ellul's Concept of Propaganda (1965)

Ellul (1965) offers an in-depth analysis of propaganda from a sociological perspective and identifies psychology and sociology as important points of reference for its use. However, Ellul admits that he does not explicitly cover the "[psychological] foundations of propaganda" and he leaves out the explicit examination of people's emotions, cognition and motivation (Ellul, 1965, p. xiii), which are essential parts of the present OPPC-model.

Ellul concurs with the argument made in this paper and stresses the importance of soft power in "propaganda" (which represents a narrower category than OPPC):

Ellul emphasizes that modern propaganda is based on a deep knowledge of psychology and sociology and relies on the analysis of people's desires, needs, conditioning and the influence of groups: "Without the scientific research of modern psychology and sociology there would be no propaganda, or rather we still would be in the primitive stages of propaganda that existed in the time of Pericles or Augustus" (Ellul, 1965, p. 4).

Ellul also defines propaganda in a way that once again stresses its organized and psychological character that is also part of the framework of OPPC:

> Propaganda is a set of methods employed by an organized group that wants to bring about the active or passive participation in actions of a mass of individuals, psychologically unified through psychological manipulations and incorporated in an organization. (Ellul, 1965, p. 61)

Jowett and O'Donnell's "10-step-plan of propaganda analysis"

Jowett and O'Donnell's "10-step-plan of propaganda analysis" (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2019, p. 267) defines propaganda as "the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape

perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist" (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2019, p. 6). Their approach provides a valuable framework for examining the context, participants, messages and feedback-loop of propaganda in the narrow sense and OPPC in a wider sense. However, the psychological perspective needs further elaboration: it is important to differentiate further between the 'manipulation of cognition' and the 'direction of behavior' and to illustrate how they work out in an OPPC-setting.

The Interdisciplinary OPPC-Model, Its Key Elements and Scientific Background

As stated above, current research for example by Bakir et al. (2019) has formulated the need to conceptualize OPPC as a broader analytical category. The authors argue that the strategies used in OPPC draw upon "sociology, international relations, political science, communications, philosophy, persuasion and rhetoric" (Bakir et al., 2019, p. 319). However, it has also been stated that psychology has been playing a particularly important role in the development of modern propaganda (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2019; Moloney and McGrath 2020) and therefore the propaganda model presented in this article is at its core an interdisciplinary, psychological model that focuses upon the individual's psyche and the different psychological levels that are important when observing why and how propaganda affects an individual or groups of people.

The OPPC model presented in this article therefore covers both communicative and psychological foundations and mechanisms of propaganda. It offers a 'fresh perspective' (Robinson, 2019) by providing a deeper understanding of propaganda, especially in the area of psychological research, by linking it to communicative aspects and by providing a reference point for researchers from different scientific backgrounds.

At this point, it has to be noted that such an analysis of the processing of OPPC from a psychological perspective would require, in order to be extensive, a much more detailed and lengthy analysis. Given the brevity of this article it is therefore not possible to illustrate each step in detail—it is, however, possible to provide an outline of the relevant psychological aspects and their links to the practical OPPC perspective and provide a structure and orientation for future research.

In the following section, first the model's basic overall structure will be explained. Then the different elements and their scientific background will be analyzed and linked to already existing propaganda research.

The Structure

The model (Figure 1) features two main elements—the transmitter and the receiver of propaganda—which are embedded in a communicative process of construction, dissemination, the societal background, reception, and psychological processing resulting in

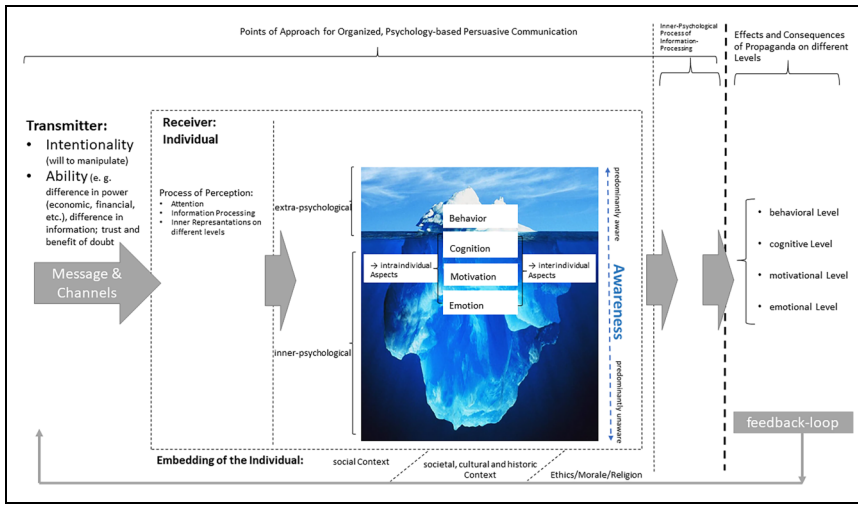


Figure 1. The OPPC Model.

(measurable) outcomes at the receiver's side, with a feedback-loop completing the process.

The communicative aspect of the structure uses Lasswell's formula of "who says what to whom with what effect" (Lasswell, 1948) and Bühler's Organ Model (1933) as points of reference but does not treat them as the sole theoretical foundation. The message and channel are not counted as separate elements of the OPPC model, but rather as communicative components within this analytical framework. The message represents the communicative content produced by the transmitter while the channel is part of the dissemination before the content reaches the receiver. Once the message has reached the receiver, the process of perception begins. The structure of the present model offers a medium level of abstraction, which makes it possible to analyze the transmission, reception, processing, and the effects of OPPC as a whole as well as at an individual level (Kuhbandner & Schelhorn, 2020).

The psychological aspects of this model refer to a broad field of psychological research, drawing upon insights of research on psychology of (mass) communication (Hovland et al., 1949; Sanborn, 2018; Simpson, 1994; Tannenbaum & Greenberg, 1968), motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Maslow, 1954), emotion (Izard, 1991; Kuhbandner & Schelhorn, 2020) and feedback (Butterick, 2011; Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

As a consequence, the focus of this model is less on media effects (Kenski & Jamieson, 2017), and more on the psychological aspects of processing OPPC, the different levels at which soft-power-techniques operate and the effects and outcomes they generate. OPPC is therefore best understood as a fundamental extension of the

communicative framework provided by Lasswell within a broader, interdisciplinary framework.

The Different Elements

The model consists of five elements: transmitter, receiver, process, effects, and feedback loop. Message and channel are treated as communicative components within the model's structure. In this context, "process" refers to the inner-psychological process of information-processing. It is closely linked to the receiver but follows chronologically after the reception of the message.

This analysis is consistent with the strategy proposed by Jowett and O'Donnell, who consider context, sender, intent, message, channel, audience, and response as key dimensions of propaganda analysis, which they place within communication studies (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2019, p. 6). Although it has been argued that Lasswell's formula has been overused in the recent research in communication studies and political communication (Robinson, 2019; Simpson, 1994), this article follows the argument of Sapienza et al. (2015, p. 617) who considers it to be flexible enough to meet the theoretical needs of current research. This article agrees and argues that it provides a valuable and valid framework concerning the communicative process into which the psychological structure is embedded.

In addition to Lasswell's paradigm (1948), Bühler's organ model (1933), which distinguishes between emitter, receiver and the topic and has a more linguistic focus, is another important point of reference. A similar structure is presented by Grunig and Hunt (1984, p. 24): source—message—medium receiver with a feedback-loop connecting the receiver and the source, which makes it a "two-way asymmetric model." The model presented here focuses on "scientific persuasion" (Butterick, 2011, p. 27) as a form of "communication […] aimed at changing one type of behavior to another," as Butterick (2011, p. 27) writes. What makes the model a two-way model is the fact that "the communicator gets feedback from the public and then applies [to] it the latest communication and persuasion theories to persuade that audience to accept the organisation's point of view" (Butterick, 2011, p. 27). Although Grunig and Hunt's model was relevant from the 1920s through to the 1950s as Butterick claims, this article rejects this claim and follows, as stated, the critics' point of view that the practice of OPPC is more asymmetric than PR teaching claims (Moloney and McGrath, 2020). It is also not true that changing the behavior alone is the target of OPPC—this would leave out changing people's cognition, emotion and motivation that are part of OPPC.

The Transmitter

The first part of the present model deals with the transmitter of the message who is characterized by two key elements: intentionality and ability to influence.

As Ellul (1965, p. xi) writes, the "aim to indoctrinate" has been the key purpose of propaganda and the model therefore assumes that propaganda does not happen by chance: there is a transmitter of propaganda willing to deliberately use some form of persuasive communication (Butterick, 2011; Moloney and McGrath, 2020) or soft power to achieve a desired outcome. According to Bernays, "[t]he engineering of consent is the very essence of the democratic process" (Bernays, 1947, p. 114).

The second characterization of the emitter is that he or she is not only willing, but also able to use soft power. Therefore, the model assumes a difference in ability, knowledge and power, following German, who writes: "Public relations messages reflect the interests of the dominant powers, which in our society are entrenched political and financial interests. The goal of public relations is most often the protection of that power base. … Public relations messages are grounded in the economic values of the corporation" (German, 1995, p. 293). The point of view that the emitter is more powerful than the receiver is also shared by Herman and Chomsky, who observe an "inequality of wealth and power" which allows the emitters "to get their messages across to the public" (Herman and Chomsky, 1988, p. 2; Mullen, 2017, p. 20). Ellul, too, claims that a propaganda model has to take into account that propaganda defends "the economic, social, and political agenda of privileged groups that dominate the domestic society and the state" (Ellul, 1965, p. 298). For Bakir et al. (2019), the emitters possess preponderant resources in society (p. 325).

It is not only economic power that sets the emitter above the receiver. It shall be part of the specifications of this model that it assumes a degree of professional knowledge in the use of soft power and a certain social status that grants the emitter trust and/or the benefit of doubt of the receiver. OPPC with regard to the aspect of professional knowledge can therefore be described as "action based only on thorough knowledge of the situation and on the application of scientific principles and tried practices to the task of getting people to support ideas and programs" (Bernays, 1947, p. 114).

The emitter sends a message, corresponding to the "what" in Lasswell's paradigm (1948) and to the message element in Grunig and Hunt's model (1984, p. 24). This message is conveyed via soft-power-techniques, or as Moloney and McGrath describe it: "the intention of the PR message producers towards their audiences is to construct messages that are manipulative and propagandistic. They are messages of 'tell' rather than 'say': constructed to get compliance from their audiences" (Moloney and McGrath, 2020, p. 32).

Through a process of dissemination, which itself can be examined through sophisticated models of the various possible channels involved (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2019, p. 322), the message reaches the receiver. Although the channel of the message is an important element of the process of OPPC (Herman and Chomsky, 1988; Jowett & O'Donnell, 2019) and is therefore included in the model presented in this paper, its main focus lies predominantly on the psychological process of perception through which a message reaches the individual. This leads to the next element: the receiver.

The Receiver

In order for any kind of persuasive communication to be effective it has to take into account the complex processes through which a message reaches an individual's psychological system. "A main goal of the propagandist is to spread the message to target audiences and to do so effectively" writes Hyzen (2023, p. 56). It is also important to not only analyze the individual him- or herself but to take into account the different social "layers" into which the individual is embedded, i.e., the social context, the societal, historical and cultural context and overarching values like religion or ethics (Christiansen & Chandan, 2021) which potentially encompass what can be called a "collective unconsciousness" (Wildner, 2016, p. 358).

The model proposes to first consider the process of the individual's perception and then the effects on its behavior, cognition, motivation and emotion as well as a differentiation between intra- and inter-individual aspects of the individual that can be targeted with OPPC.

The differentiation between (directly observable) behavior and (not directly observable) cognition, motivation and emotion is illustrated with the iceberg-model (Tögel, 2020). The conceptualization into these six elements provides, as stated above, a rough outline of the psychological elements involved in the analysis of OPPC and represents only one possible way of looking at the phenomenon as a whole.

The Receiver: Perception

First, the process or perception has to be considered, and well-established models like the Atkinson-Shiffrin memory-model (Asendorpf & Neyer, 2012; Atkinson & Shiffrin, 1968), which is still considered to be a reference point for PR-research for example in the military context (Claverie et al., 2022), can be considered to be important points of reference from a psychological perspective. Another aspect that is important to consider when analyzing the process of perception is that of "encoding" which encompasses selective encoding, categorial encoding and memory storage (Pfister et al., 2017, p. 343), which is the focus of the Atkinson-Shiffrin-model. Another important element of these models is attention (Keller, 1987) which can be managed deliberately (Davenport & Völpel, 2001; Lipnowski et al., 2020; Valliere & Gegenhuber, 2013).

Attention, though, provides only a kind of "filter" (Kuhbandner & Schelhorn, 2020, p. 23) for the whole process of perception, which is, as a whole, of interest to OPPC via so-called 'perception management' (Callamari & Reveron, 2003; Elsbach, 2013).

Bakir et al. adopt a practical point of view and state that the deception in OPPC at this point could work "through misdirection [which] entails producing and disseminating true information intended to direct attention away from problematic issues" (2019, p. 322). Other relevant aspects of encoding are (multiple) reference points, for example via comparisons, framing, anchoring or the status-quo-bias (Heyman et al., 2004; Ordez et al., 2000; Pfister et al., 2017; Wang & Johnson, 2012).

Another aspect that has to be considered is how the external world is mentally represented: different levels (models, propositions, and images; Greca & Moreira, 1997; Kuhbandner & Schelhorn, 2020, p. 22) are important because they are linked to the rational, emotional and basic-need-system of the human psyche that MacLean proposed (Kuhbandner & Schelhorn, 2020, p. 30; MacLean et al., 1973, 1977).

The Receiver: The Individual Psyche

Once the external information has reached the psychological system, the content can have an effect on different levels. In this model, a rough structure of the human psyche, differentiating between extra-psychological elements (predominantly a person's behavior) and inner-psychological elements (cognition, emotion, and motivation) is assumed. On a psychological level, there is a huge amount of research supporting the model's assumption that effects on all four different levels are possible and that the different levels interact with each other as well (Lorenzo-Luaces et al., 2015).

Another distinction proposed by the model is that extra-psychological elements are predominantly conscious, i.e., a person is much more likely to be aware of them. In contrast, inner-psychological elements are predominantly unconscious—a finding that draws upon extensive research as well (Ffytche, 2011; Freud & Deuticke, 1899/2017, 1916; Jung, 2014; Kahneman, 2011). The iceberg-model (Tögel, 2020) serves as a heuristic reminder to illustrate this division into extra-psychological elements of which the individual is predominantly aware, and inner-psychological elements of which the individual is predominantly unaware.

The model further sub-categorises those parts of cognition, motivation and emotion (Kuhbandner & Schelhorn, 2020; Kuhl, 2010) that are shared by most people in a group (i.e., interindividual elements of the human psyche), such as basic needs as described by Maslow (1954), Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000) or further differentiated by Kuhbandner and Schelhorn (2020), and intraindividual elements like an individual's personality.

At this point it has to be noted that it would be very difficult to cover all relevant aspects of research on cognition, emotion, and motivation. However, it should be made clear that in order to analyze the aspects of the human psyche relevant for OPPC, further research is needed to determine the extent to which they interact and which aspects of these variables are essential. One way of looking at them is from an integrative perspective, as proposed by Dai and Sternberg (2004, p. xi): "[…] we pursue a different tack, an integrative approach, which views motivation, emotion, and cognition as inextricably related, for good or ill, in intellectual functioning and development." The authors show how closely linked the three variables can be viewed and summarize that the book shows a "cross-talk, explicit and implicit, beyond and across the disciplinary boundaries of differential, developmental, social-cultural, motivational and cognitive traditions, encompassing the whole spectrum of neurobiological, psychological-behavioral, and phenomenological levels of analysis" (Dai, 2004, p. 419). Given the fact that propaganda research today is still underdeveloped (Robinson, 2019), further research is needed to determine whether an integrative perspective is the most fruitful approach when analysing OPPC. This part of the

model is therefore deliberately designed as a structural overview (Berkowitz, 1982) and does not provide a final answer to that question.

The most conscious and extra-psychological part of the model, behavior, encompasses all kinds of human actions including variables such as habit (Duhigg, 2012) that are, amongst others, linked to the classic school of thought of behaviorism (Skinner, 1974; Watson, 1924).

Both the triad of variables (cognition, motivation, emotion) and the deliberate changing of behavior can be possible points of approach for OPPC.

Practical Considerations

From a practical point of view, the model offers an explanation and a deeper understanding for a multitude of possible techniques, of which only a small number can be illustrated here: OPPC can, for example, assume that a certain "low factual and cognitive content in relation to high emotional content" (Moloney and McGrath, 2020, p. 32) such as pictures of suffering children (Peacock, 2010) or other atrocities (Lasswell, 1926; Lasswell et al., 1980; Ponsonby, 1928) will affect a wide range of people because it touches upon the basic needs for security (Maslow, 1954) or self-determination (which focuses, for example, on the "perceived-locus-of-causality"; Deci & Ryan, 1985, p. 7). One of the founding fathers of public relations, Ivy Lee, summed up the business's concern with feelings rather than rational argument by saying that "[p]eople are guided more by sentiment than by mind" (Ewen, 1996, p. 132). He later described the practice of public relations as the "art of steering heads inside," made possible through the study of "human emotions and all the factors that move people" (Ewen, 1996, p. 132). This emotional aspect of OPPC has a long history and goes back as far as Aristotle's Art of Rhetoric (Sokolon, 2006). Because of the huge importance in understanding OPPC, the psychological perspective is at the centre of the model presented here, arguing, as explained above, that many PR and propaganda models lack a deeper psychological foundation.

Other leverage points for OPPC could be heuristics or cognitive biases (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008, p. 2021; Tversky & Kahneman, 1992), like for example the confirmation bias (Klayman, 1968; Mercier, 2016). Because of the sheer number of biases (Benson & Manoogian, 2021) it becomes almost impossible to elaborate further on them. OPPC as it is practiced today has shown to constantly and deliberately refer to and exploit these human flaws or "blunders" (Butterick, 2011; Lee & Lee, 1939; Simpson, 1994; Thaler & Sunstein, 2008, p. 17).

While basic needs can be assumed to represent interpersonal, commonly shared psychological traits, other parts of the human psyche vary greatly from person to person, classified in the model as intrapersonal aspects. For a long time, these interpersonal aspects were very difficult to target with OPPC because of a media landscape that offered only limited possibilities to target people individually, with targeted mailing presenting one of the few options (Johnson, 1997; Petrison & Wang, 1993).

With the advent of the internet and social media platforms this has changed drastically (White & Boatwright, 2020; Zuboff, 2019). From a psychological perspective, analyses concerned with intrapersonal characteristics like the "widely accepted" (Egges et al., 2003, p. 454) five-factor OCEAN model of personality (DeYoung et al., 2007; Goldberg, 1992) come into play. Other examples are the individual habits that people have developed, different (cultural) traditions, values or beliefs (Duhigg, 2012; Phillips, 1986).

From an OPPC perspective the so-called micro-targeting (Jamieson, 2013; Zuboff, 2019) has become an important technique: Big-data analysis, for example of users' Twitter or Facebook activities, allows for an individual classification of people's personality, for example via the OCEAN model (Kosinski et al., 2013; Markovikj et al., 2013; Matz et al., 2017; Quercia et al., 2011;). That knowledge can in turn be used to develop individual messages, tailored to a person's OCEAN score. This is a very recent form of OPPC which offers on the one hand "great potential" and on the other hand entails serious ethical questions concerning people's privacy and the protection of personal data (Frindte & Geschke, 2019, p. 418; Zuboff, 2019).

The Inner-Psychological Process of Information-Processing

The next step is the processing of the information transported via OPPC. This process can be analyzed from different perspectives and at different levels.

Atkinson and Shiffrin (1968) or Baddeley and Hitch (Baddeley, 2006; Baddeley & Hitch, 2019) can serve as a point of reference for the different filters and memory systems that information passes before being stored in the long-term memory. Another perspective is offered by looking at the neural networks (Çeliköz et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2003). OPPC processing occurs not only at a cognitive level alone but also involves complex interactions such as belief change resulting in actions (Peppas, 1993; Vainio & Paloniemi, 2013) or habit change resulting in different beliefs (Duhigg, 2012).

The processing of OPPC results in outcomes at different levels that mirror the different 'levels of attack' for OPPC. OPPC can therefore have effects on an extra-psychological level, resulting in a certain behavior, or at an inner-psychological level with changes in cognitions, motivation and emotions. It is almost commonplace that OPPC "tells people what to think about and how to behave" (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2019).

The Feedback-Loop

The different levels of outcome are measured via a feedback-loop (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Although feedback has proven to be an effective tool to maximize outcomes in other areas of research (Hattie & Timperley, 2007), current OPPC does not use it to the extent it should: "too few [PR programmes] undertake an effective evaluation of what has been done" (Butterick, 2011, p. 158) Butterick criticizes. However, tools for the assessment of mood or opinion changes in a targeted population do exist: polls

or surveys like Gallup or the search for nudges in social networks (Veriphix Inc., 2022) are examples for possible feedback-loops for the influence and effectiveness of OPPC.

Future Research Venues

The analytical framework provided in this paper can serve as a starting point and analytical basis for a multitude of different research approaches: its five elements can be operationalized and examined separately. Transmitter characteristics can be examined from a sociological perspective, for example power-structure research or network analysis, expertise, content, or inferred intent. Messages and channels can be examined from a media perspective through content, wording, framing, target audience, reception, etc.; reception from a psychological perspective, independently measuring cognition, emotion, motivation and behavioral outcomes; feedback can be measured through mixed-methods designs of qualitative and quantitative research with a focus on behavior or targeting. Mixed-methods designs alongside surveys, panels, digital feedback or further theoretical developments could be used to test the interaction and structure of the framework and its elements and to deepen our understanding of OPPC.

Discussion

The OPPC-model presented in this article reacts to the call for a fresh perspective through propaganda studies and the need to take the discipline of propaganda research further (Auerbach & Castronovo, 2013; Bakir et al., 2019; Richards, 2023; Robinson, 2019). It illustrates certain elements, above all the psychological variables, that are presented at a medium level of abstraction and with the aim of providing an overview and a structural analysis of OPPC both from a psychological as well as from a communicative point of view—a perspective that has, until this point, not been explicitly articulated and in detail by current propaganda research. This combination of past and recent propaganda research results in an integrative, interdisciplinary model that illustrates the process of the use of soft power in an OPPC-setting and can therefore be used as a point of reference for future OPPC research.

However, the model does have its limitations: due to the multitude of soft-power-techniques it is impossible to give a full overview of the possibilities (and dangers) that lie within its use in an OPPC setting and further research is needed to get a full grasp of this phenomenon.

Furthermore, it is not possible to do justice to all the models and approaches to propaganda and many models and theories have not been included in this overview. These theories and models range from Bernays (1928), Lippmann (1922, 1925) and Lasswell et al. (1935), to Schmitt-Beck (2007), Hovland et al. (1949), Clausen (1989) or Zollmann (2019) and Klaehn et al. (2022). Although all of these are worth considering, an a priori evaluation of these models has shown that the epistemological insights of the analytical category of OPPC have not or only partially been covered by current

or past propaganda research, and the above-cited approaches to the study of OPPC are no different.

In addition to that, the approach of this article bears in itself limitations, too: the detailed outline of the concept and structure of OPPC does not in itself touch upon the psychological mechanisms of how OPPC operates, which, in turn, calls for an in-depth analysis of the different mechanisms at work.

This paper also does not provide an extensive normative discussion, which would need further, extensive elaboration (Bakir et al., 2019; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Parsons, 2016; Thaler & Sunstein, 2021; White, 2013) that is often part of the discourse surrounding the use of soft power in OPPC. It does not argue that persuasion is to be dismissed as a phenomenon *per se*. For the purpose of the model the critical analysis focuses on the deliberate use of soft power in an organized way to systematically exploit psychological vulnerabilities and differences in power with regard to information, knowledge, and communicative resources.

The OPPC-model presented in this article can therefore only serve as a starting-point, not as the final point, of a detailed analysis of modern-day OPPC.

Conclusion

Current propaganda research continues to face a lack of definitional clarity and an uneven treatment of OPPC within liberal democracies.

This paper has argued that OPPC can serve as an analytical framework for the deliberate use of soft power. It offers a broader perspective on the phenomenon without simply replacing the term "propaganda." It combines a communicative framework of transmitter, message, receiver and feedback-loop and adds a further, analytical layer that embeds the individual psyche and its elements of cognition, emotion, motivation and behavior as well as the embedding of the individual in the individual and societal structure into this framework. OPPC and the corresponding, conceptual model require further empirical research and testing. Its intended contribution is to provide a clear point of reference for such research and contribute to a deeper, analytical understanding of OPPC and the construction, dissemination and processing of persuasive communication. It can also serve as the basis for a normative discussion about the use of OPPC.

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