DoD Manipulates Media in the US Wars: From Information Warfare to Cyber Operation

Ji Yao

Jinan University, Guangzhou, China

Media, as a source of information, plays a crucial role in opinion-making and perception building. In the wars the United States had waged, the media's role was to shape the images of war while propagating specific ideas to influence the people. As a result, the world perceived propagandistic messages that appeared to take the form of fake news. Comparing the Gulf War and the Iraq War, it is found that the US government and military have continuously strengthened the wartime news censorship system and used their official background as a media source to provide false information. With this insight, this paper attempts to comprehend the role of media propaganda which promoted the agenda of a media spectacle of the US military victory by transforming into a presentation of anarchy that destabilizes the rationale behind the invasion. It also provides an overview of the development of the Gulf War and Iraq War through the lens of the Herman Chomsky Propaganda model. This model elucidates the role of propaganda in manipulating the opinion of the U.S. people and how it was used to achieve economic, social, and political advantages.

Keywords: information warfare, propaganda, disinformation

Background

From World War I to present day international conflicts, media has played a large part in bringing information to the public, influencing their perceptions of wars that the United States plays a part in, and conducting propaganda and psychological warfare against the enemy, thus making a direct contribution to the war. U.S. television coverage during the U.S.-Soviet Cold War was often written, and sometimes produced, by the U.S. defense agencies. The Soviet Union was also a player in intelligence warfare during World War II and the Cold War, with Russia spreading disinformation in its conflicts with Georgia and Ukraine in 2008 and 2014, respectively, including the use of "little green men" armed men) to cover up the actions of the Russian military. The development of this state-influenced media is critical to gaining public support for state action. Even private Western media has an obligation to defend the country's economic and military interests, and the media can successfully provide public support for government actions against foreign enemies.

As the former US secretary of defense Jim Mattis says that U.S. is emerging from a period of strategic atrophy, aware that our competitive military advantage has been eroding (Jim Mattis, 2018). U.S. is facing increased global disorder, characterized by decline in the long-standing rules-based international order —

creating a security environment more complex and volatile than any U.S. has experienced in recent memory. Inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in U.S. national security.

Catherine A. Theohary, specialist in National Security Policy, Cyber and Information Operations thinks that in terms of U.S. government bureaucracy, there are debates in the United States about where the IW center of gravity should be. During the Cold War, the epicenter in the U.S. government was the Department of State and the U.S. Information Agency (Catherine A. Theohary, 2018, p. 2). Since 9/11, much of the current doctrine and capability resides with the military, leading some to posit that the epicenter should be the Pentagon. But others worry that the military should not be involved in the production of propaganda.

The U.S. Government is the "Gatekeeper" of the Mainstream Media in Wartime

Star Wars-era Misleading Propaganda

Space exploration served as another dramatic arena for Cold War competition. On March 23, 1983, former U.S. President Ronald Reagan gave a passionate televised speech on the television screen. He said: "Tonight...we are taking an important step... This is where we begin a program of defensive measures against the daunting Soviet missile threat... I call on the American scientific community to put them Our ingenuity turns to the cause of human and world peace: to create a way to render nuclear weapons useless... The effort we embark on tonight promises to change the course of human history." In October of the same year, the US Department of Defense proposed a "Strategic Defense Initiative" (SDI) research program based on a new concept based on Reagan's suggestion. American society at the time was showing an entertaining fictional feature film, "Star Wars". Not only did the overwhelming media coverage feed the Kremlin half-truths and lies about the project, but also helped persuade the Soviets to spend tens of billions of dollars to counter the American effort to develop a space-based shield against nuclear attack proposed by former President Ronald Reagan. Besides the information originally intended for consumption in the Kremlin also seeped into closed briefings that helped persuade Congress to spend more money on strategic defense. The American public's attention was captivated by the space race, and the various developments by the Soviet and U.S. space programs were heavily covered in the national media. This frenzy of interest was further encouraged by the new medium of television. Astronauts came to be seen as the ultimate American heroes, and earth-bound men and women seemed to enjoy living vicariously through them. Soviets, in turn, were pictured as the ultimate villains, with their massive, relentless efforts to surpass America and prove the power of the communist system.

However, a decade later, officials in the "Star Wars" project rigged a crucial 1984 test and faked other data in a program of deception that misled Congress as well as the intended target, the Soviet Union, four former Reagan Administration officials said. The test also deceived news organizations, which reported it widely. All would speak only on the condition that they not be named, and several was still holding sensitive military and intelligence posts. One military officer who described the deception program said it had overstepped its boundaries. "It wasn't designed to deceive Congress," he said, "It was used improperly."

The deception program was also approved by Caspar W. Weinberger, the Secretary of Defense from 1981 to 1987. Mr. Weinberger said that Congress was not deceived and that deceiving one's enemies is natural and necessary to any major military initiative. "You always work on deception," he said in an interview from his home in Maine. "You're always trying to practice deception. You are obviously trying to mislead your

opponents and to make sure that they don't know the actual facts."[1] The use of deception should be seen in the context of the cold war, when disinformation was a weapon used by both sides. It is undeniable that the propaganda of traditional media has an important influence on information warfare.

Disintegrated News Reports

There is considerable reason to believe that external and internal conflicts are an important driving force behind the tides of public opinion. In fact, internal and external conflict tend to have diametrically opposite effects on social dynamics. Ultimately, the dynamics of social forces affect the composition of public opinion (Lewis A. Coser, 1956, p. 32).

The Civil War established the framework that would characterize the media-military relationship to the present day. The two institutions have always shared a tense but symbiotic relationship. During times of war, the military depends on the media to defuse enemy propaganda, to serve as an information conduit to the people, and to rally domestic support (Phillip Knightley, 1975, p. 206; Joseph S. Nye Jr., 2003, pp. 60, 67). A war that lasts more than a few days requires the consent of the public, and that consent is not forthcoming without at least some favorable information on the war's progress.[2] Consequently, the military has sought to mold that coverage to serve its own ends, frequently relying on prepublication review of reporters' stories and restricting their access to the battlefield and politically damaging information.

Until the Mexican War that US officials censored journalists over reporting war information, and closed newspapers that officers claimed could undermine US operations, including the American-owned Genius of Liberty. The Gulf War saw the return of mandatory censorship through a review system. On 14 January 1991, days before US operations began, the Department of Defense (DOD) issued the Operation Desert Shield Ground Rules and Supplementary Guidelines, which banned disclosing several types of information from past wars, including future military operations/military plans; troop movements; statistics on critical war supplies (e.g., numbers of tanks and amounts of fuel); effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the enemy's camouflage, cover, deception, targeting, direct and indirect fire, intelligence collection, or security measures; aerial photos/views of sites of military importance (e.g., fixed military installations), troop locations, and the number/size of troops. Correspondents had to submit all articles, video, and photos to the DOD's public affairs officers who checked for security information the Operation Desert Shield Ground Rules and Supplementary Guidelines listed, including rules against reporting intelligence collection activities and rules of engagement (Matthew Jacobs, 1992, pp. 686-687). If correspondents objected to any censorship by public affairs officers, it could take days for final decisions, which technically belonged to correspondents' respective news organizations.

In another restriction of media coverage, the military used a media pool system in which a select number of US journalists embedded with military units had to share their articles, photos, and videos with other news organizations. When US operations began, the military had placed about 14 per cent (192/1,400) of available

---

[1] See "Interview with Caspar Weinberger" on the series programs "War and Peace in the Nuclear Age", Dec 11, 1987, available online at: https://openvault.wgbh.org/catalog/V_68874174EEBB4E4396FFD194DF0EE934.

[2] Arthur Lubow, Read Some About It, NEW REPUBLIC, Mar 18, 1991, at 23, 25. The Department of Defense acknowledged its dependence on the media in the ground rules issued to embeds in the War in Iraq, stating: Media coverage of any future operation will, to a large extent, shape public perception of the national security environment now and in the years ahead. This holds true for the U.S. public: the public in allied countries whose opinion can affect the durability of our coalition; and publics in countries where we conduct operations, whose perceptions of us can affect the cost and duration of our involvement. P. 402 app. (citing Dep't of Def. Public Affairs Guidance on Embedding Media During Possible Future Operations/Deployments in the U.S. Central Commands Area of Responsibility para. 2.A (2003), available online at: http://www.dod.miUnews/Feb2003/d20030228 pag.pdf.

journalists (including reporters, TV cameramen, and technicians) into the pool system, and throughout the war even detained such journalists as the New York Times' Chris Hedges for avoiding the pool system and covering events at their own risk. There were many times the military blocked journalists from covering events, including nearly all of the war's thousands of air missions (the military allowed no journalists with pilots).

Similar to rules in World War I and the Vietnam War, the Persian Gulf War had rules against reporting special operations forces' methods, unique equipment, or tactics and information on intelligence collection activities (including targets, methods, and results). Although journalists were allowed to accompany the army and the media to report comprehensively on the war, their real purpose was to make better use of the media and control public opinion. Following rules set in the Vietnam War, "no questions about American and British casualties, no questions about ongoing military operations, and no questions about the next battle plan". The military further banned discussion of details of missing or downed aircraft or ships while search and rescue operations are planned or under way, names of operations in progress, size of friendly/coalition forces involved in operations in progress, location of mission aircraft points of origin, and rules of engagement. The Persian Gulf War's new rules were ones banning release of information on the operational or support vulnerabilities of US and coalition forces; specific operating methods and tactics (e.g., air angles of attack or speeds, naval tactics, and evasive manoeuvres); level of security at military installations or encampments; and photos/video showing the level of security at military installations or encampments. Every rule in the Persian Gulf War protected the US military or allies.

The Times Poll in 1993 showed that 88% of the American public said that the news media, overall, did a "good" job, only 17% said the media did a "very good" job-down from 30% in a 1985 Times poll; 11% said they did a "bad" job-up from the 4% "bad" rating the media received in 1985 (David Shaw, 1993). However, Gallup and Knight's Trust, Media and Democracy studies had found in its recent poll that Americans' trust in the news media has fallen significantly over the past 20 years: a majority of Americans currently see "a great deal" (46%) or "a fair amount" (37%) of political bias in news coverage.

Figure 1   Views on the Role of News Media (2017–2019)

Source: Gallup Research Center

Overall, it can be seen from the conclusions that public confidence in and respect for the news media are seriously eroding.

The U.S. government adopted a policy different from that of the 1991 Gulf War when it came to reporting on military operations in Iraq, and while ostensibly few changes to journalists' coverage, the policy on media censorship was actually stricter. The military agreed to let 600 journalists join selected U.S. troops, eat, live, travel with soldiers in their units, and conduct interviews and reports in designated units, that was, embedded news reporting. The Media at War in Iraq, through its sheer breadth of interviews, had established itself as the definitive account, not of the fighting, but the coverage of the fighting. Embedded successfully mobilized the public to support the government's action to overthrow Saddam Hussein's government through reports by military reporters, and to calm domestic and international public opinion's opposition and doubts about the war. The U.S. military made it clear that they were not responsible for the fate of freelance journalists who did not join the U.S. military or one of its allies (Daoud Kuttab, 2007, pp. 879–891). This showed that the US government did not want non-embedded media to report, because such reporting was not under their control. In order to ensure that journalists participating in this operation were under the control of the military, the US Department of Defense released a 13-page special document on this issue, including guidance document of 7 parts and 97 paragraphs on purpose, policy, procedure, basic rules, immunization and personal protective equipment, safety, etc. Although the document claimed that the military recognizes that the news media had the right to report on military operations, the military had no intention of preventing the media from publishing negative and embarrassing reports, and asked the relevant troops to give priority to the use of transportation, communication facilities, etc. But overall, there were more concrete restrictions than vague promises. For example, the document stipulated that during operations into Iraq, "information about ongoing combat shall not be released unless approved by the field commander", "relevant to previous military operations and the results of these actions could only be described in general, general language, otherwise they would not be published". The document also stipulated that, at the beginning of the war, special attention should be paid in reporting to ensure maximum abruptness of action, journalists accompanying the military could broadcast live from airfields, battleships or land only when the first attacking unit had returned safely, or with the approval of the unit commander.

In the section marked "Basic Rules", the document listed 14 categories of information that could be published and 19 categories of information that could not be published. Prohibited information included: specific numbers of troops, warplanes, warships, photographs that may reveal the level of security, information about enemy camouflage, concealment, deception, and direct or indirect firepower, intelligence gathering or the effectiveness of security measures, etc. News organizations were prohibited from disclosing information about downed planes or ships in the course of planning or conducting search or rescue operations for downed planes or missing ships. The Pentagon's rules also prevented journalists from using their own transport, so that most of the press would get to see only what the military high command wanted them to see. There would be no safety guarantees for correspondents who took a chance on going it alone. On the contrary, they were being specifically warned that using their satellite phones could make them targets for unfriendly missile fire. The U.S. military also required journalists participating in military reports and their news organizations to sign very harsh life and death documents with the government, expressly stating that in the event of personal or property accidental injury or loss the right to sue the government. The document also stipulated that journalists should agree to abide by the basic rules and sign before participating in reporting with the army. Anyone who violated

these regulations would be immediately stopped from reporting with the army and would be removed.

In a February 18 interview on the US Public Broadcasting Service, Bryan Whitman, deputy assistant secretary of defense for media operations, disclosed some of the motivation behind the new system. He spoke of the "beauty of embedding" from the Pentagon's point of view. "We want to be able to protect that information that is going to determine the success of an operation, and we don't want any reporting that's going to unnecessarily jeopardize those individuals that are executing that mission.... I also have never met a journalist, particularly one that's traveling with that unit, that would have any interest in compromising the mission of the unit." (Henry Michaels, 2003).

The policy is detailed in a Pentagon document called Annex Foxtrot. Much of the news information comes from briefings organized by the military. Only selected journalists were allowed to visit the front lines or interview soldiers. These visits always took place in the presence of officers and require prior approval and review by the military. This policy, heavily influenced by the military's experience in the Vietnam War, was ostensibly designed to protect sensitive information from being leaked to Iraq, but it restricted not only information in the Middle East, but also what the media could say about the war.

Many reporters found such conflict unavoidable; in one survey, many said that the only way to get access to real information in a timely fashion was to operate outside of the Pentagon-imposed restrictions, thereby exposing themselves to official sanctions.[3]

According to the Los Angeles Times, the Pentagon contracted a small Washington company called The Lincoln Group to help translate and tell the story. Iraqi employees of the Lincoln Group or its subcontractors sometimes disguised themselves as freelance journalists or advertisers when reporting to Baghdad media (Mark Mazzetti & Borzou Daragahi, 2005). Articles written by the U.S. military's "Information Operations" unit were translated into Arabic and published in Baghdad newspapers with their help. "Many articles one-sidedly touted the work of the U.S. and Iraqi forces, condemned insurgents and touted U.S.-led efforts to rebuild the country". One investigation made by New York Times found that senior Pentagon officials met with news analysts who gave them "special information" and then tried to persuade them to speak positively about the Iraq war (David Barstow, 2008). The discovery was based on 8,000 pages of confidential information disclosed to New York Times through a lawsuit under the Freedom of Information Act. The article said that senior Pentagon officials will invite news analysts to secret meetings and urge analysts to positively evaluate the war. Typically, the United States provides classified information to news analysts. This was designed to obscure any links to the U.S. military (Mark Mazzetti & Borzou Daragahi, 2005).

Seventy-two percent of Americans interviewed in a CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll conducted Saturday and Sunday favored the war against Iraq, while 25% were opposed. Roughly the same number approved of the job President George W. Bush did. President George W. Bush's job approval rating was now at 71%. This represented a jump of 13 points from last weekend — an expected "rally effect" increase that usually accompanied U.S. involvement in war or a situation in which Americans were in harm's way on foreign shores.

---

[3] Gannett Foundation, supra note 24, at 32 ("Four-fifths went outside established channels to find information, while two-thirds (68 percent) said that they knew journalists who violated the guidelines.... Most said that the only way to get access to any real information in a timely fashion.., was to operate outside the [Pentagon's Joint Information Bureau].")
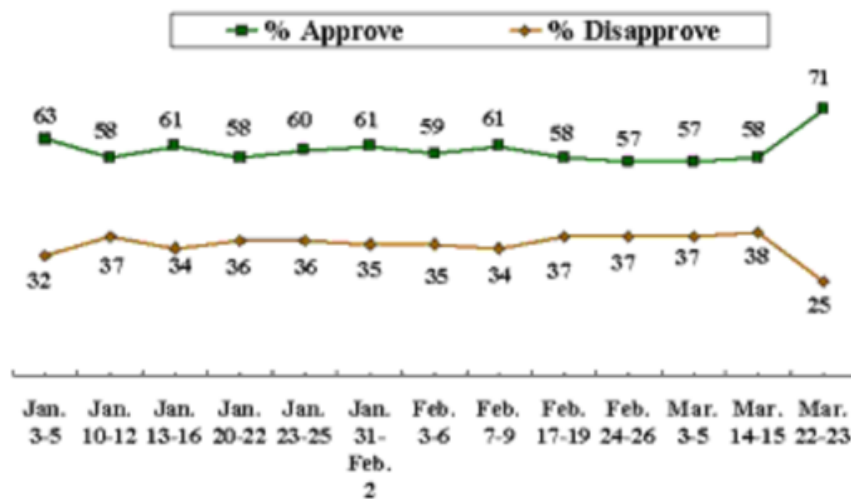
Figure 2   George W. Bush's Job Approval Rating (March 22–23, 2003)

Source: Gallup Research Cent

According to Colin Sparks, the Propaganda model acknowledges the existence of tactical arguments; it is, of course, developed to accommodate some heterogeneity, but it positions unity as the media's normal state (Collin Sparks, 2007, pp. 68–84). Its biased role towards corporate governance referred to Iraq as a threat and linked it to the September 11 attacks. The invasion of Iraq was explained to the US public by a complex propaganda campaign that followed a think tank's idea for a new foreign policy. Conversely, US media outlets failed to perform their watchdog role, failing to address and investigate the claims of the US military that they were victims of violence. A variety of media outlets fervently believed Bush's claims, and irrational beliefs, such as the assumption that Iraq had WMDs, were prevalent that caused significant damage to the credibility of the news source.

In addition, during the Iraq War, the US military continuously released "smoke screens" to exaggerate its own record and deceive the enemy, so as to cause the enemy to act wrongly. Afterwards, a lot of news was confirmed to be false, and the military's approach also aroused strong criticism and protests from the media. For example, the day after the war started, the Associated Press reported the surrender of all 8,000 soldiers of the Iraqi 51st Division. In this report, there was an authoritative source — Pentagon officials with specific time, place and background. Therefore, reliability is high. However, the Iraqi spokesman denied the news the next day, saying that the 51st Division was still fighting with the U.S. military. Subsequently, the division commander appeared on Iraqi TV and fully refuted the U.S. lie. Throughout the news dissemination of the war, the principle of authenticity of news was severely violated.

The media do not stop to ponder the bias that is inherent in the priority assigned to government-supplied raw material, or the possibility that the government might be manipulating the news, imposing its own agenda, and deliberately diverting attention from other material. One structural relationship of importance is the media companies' dependence on and ties with government. The political ties of the media have been impressive.

Mark Fishman calls this "the principle of bureaucratic affinity: only other bureaucracies can satisfy the input needs of a news bureaucracy" (Mark Fishman, 1980, p. 143). Government and corporate sources also have the great merit of being recognizable and credible by their status and prestige. This is important to the

mass media. As Fishman notes, newsworkers are predisposed to treat bureaucratic accounts as factual because news personnel participate in upholding a normative order of authorized knowers in the society. Reporters operate with the attitude that officials ought to know what it is their job to know. In particular, a newsworker will recognize an official's claim to knowledge merely as a claim, but as a credible, competent piece of knowledge. This amounts to a moral division of labor: officials have and give the facts; reporters merely get them (Mark Fishman, 1980, pp. 144–145).

Another reason for the heavy weight given to official sources is that the mass media claim to be "Objective" dispensers of the news. Partly to maintain the image of objectivity, but also to protect themselves from criticisms of bias and the threat of libel suits, they need material that can be portrayed as presumptively accurate (Gaye Tuchman, 1972, pp. 662–664). Editorial distortion is aggravated by the news media's dependence upon private and governmental news sources. If a given newspaper, television station, magazine, etc., incurs disfavor from the sources, it is subtly excluded from access to information. To minimize such financial danger, news media businesses editorially distort their reporting to favor government and corporate policies in order to stay in business (Edward S. Herman & Noam Chomsky, 2010, pp. 10–40).

The relationship between the US media and the government's military has not always been harmonious. Once these reports contradict the government's decision-making, the government will be in an embarrassing situation. The White House and the Pentagon had successively criticized the American media's coverage of the confrontation between the United States and Iraq. Former presidential press secretary Ari Fleisher once had a confrontation with the media, criticizing report was like "a floorball game"[4]. On March 29, 2003, the "*Washington Times*" said that some officials revealed that Bush was disappointed in the press in private, and even accused the press of being "stupid".[5] Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld also publicly charged American journalists from "highs to lows to highs and back again" for "immature reporting" of military news.[6] However, the American news media has always claimed that it is the "fourth level" independent of the government, that it is the monitor of the government and the defender of the public interest. The media also want to influence the government's agenda through their reporting, so they often disagree with the government on some issues. This is why the U.S. government strictly controls the media during wartime.

Weaponized Social Media

The transmission of information has become ubiquitous. Unlike traditional media, social media improves reach, frequency, permanence and immediacy. Social media allows the interactive communication between people without spatial limits or time constraints and offer the opportunity to transfer the content of any messages under any form (vocal, visual, written) to anyone on the planet. Social media has become an amplifier of ideas, a creator of meaning and a generator of conflicts as well (Jean-Marc Rickli & Anja Kaspersen, 2016). Social media is the current vector of choice. New developments in technology such as advanced machine intelligence and learning will make these issues even more salient in the future.

---

[4] See Press Secretary Briefings by Ari Fleischer, Mar. 28, 2003, available online at: https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030328-4.html.
[5] "Press Corps Writes off Complaints by White House", The Washington Times, Mar 29, 2003.
[6] See Pentagon Press Briefing, Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld gave details of Saddam Hussein's death squads, Mar 28, 2003, available online at: https://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/WO0303/S00477/dod-detail-war-progress-death-squad-atrocities.htm.

Social Media's Role in Government

The battle of narratives has become the bedrock of international politics, and social media a powerful tool to fight this battle. The unique characteristic of social media is that it empowers and enables individuals to engage in ways unseen before. Propaganda or so-called "psy-ops" is not a new phenomenon in warfare to shape opinions and influence outcomes. The development of information and communication technologies provides new opportunities for state actors to use non-traditional warfare to achieve their goals. Warfare in the information domain has become an integral part of modern military operations, with social media platforms playing an increasing role in organization, mobilization, dissemination and intelligence. With the continuous development of social media, the use of social media to amplify fake news has become a new trend in current information warfare and public opinion warfare.

Roughly one-quarter of U.S. adults now use Twitter, and the site has become a space where users get news, discuss topics like sports, engage in personal communication or hear from elected officials. Pew Research Center conducted an in-depth survey of U.S. adults who use Twitter last year which found that Twitter users reported a mix of both positive and negative experiences on the site. For instance, 46% of these users said the site had increased their understanding of current events in the last year, and 30% said it had made them feel more politically engaged.
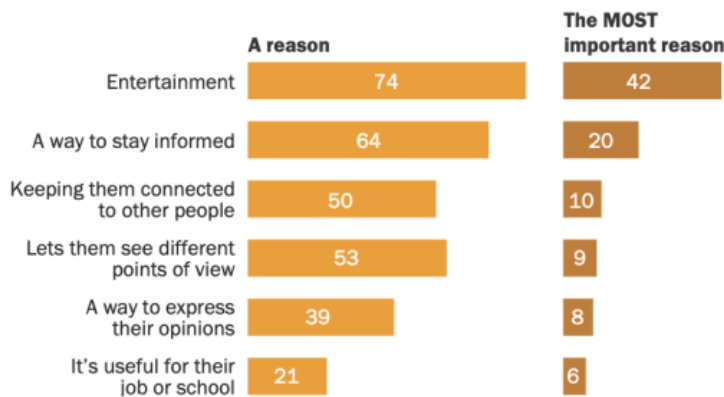

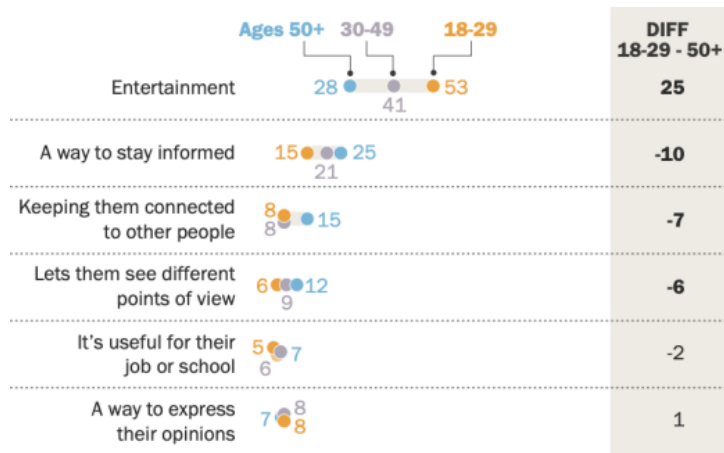**Figure 3   The Most Important Reason Why Using Twitter**

Figure 4   Twitter Users 50 and Older Are More Likely to be Active
Source: PEW Research Center

It is critical for DoD to understand the extent to which both governments and nonstate actors use social media to influence public opinion, as well as their success in doing so (William Marcellino, Meagan L. Smith, Christopher Paul, Lauren Skrabala, 2017). Monitoring social media networks and the progress of changing sentiments gives military planners an opportunity to better understand how and where these actors are working to influence public opinion. These data can then inform efforts to counter their campaigns. According to reports, the Pentagon had planned to use social networking sites to counter threats such as cyberterrorism to determine where a major event like the Arab Spring might take place next. The U.S. Department of Defense had provided $42 million in research to monitor social networks to track the formation, development and spread of ideas, and to identify misinformation and attempts to incite unrest. The program was originally implemented in 2011 by DARPA, which DARPA calls the strategic communication of social media, to develop media tools to identify misinformation and implement deceptive tactics. As of 2015, the project has spent a total of $50 million and has published more than 200 papers. These articles analyze the cognitive impact of social media on the public in terms of coordinated filtering algorithms, complementary cumulative distribution functions, egocentric networks, emotional cognition, and retweet probability models. These articles analyzed the cognitive impact of social media on the public in terms of coordinated filtering algorithms, complementary cumulative distribution functions, egocentric networks, emotional cognition, and retweeted probability models. With its openness and strong communication ability, social media has inherent advantages in guiding and manipulating public opinions, interests, emotions and psychological states, which enables it to directly attack the public's spiritual and psychological targets and reveal their values. As former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton advocated in her speech on "Internet freedom", the Internet should become an important tool for the US government to promote ideological infiltration overseas for a long time. Compared with the one-way nature of traditional media, social media, with its interactivity and timeliness, delivers carefully selected information to a large number of users, including military personnel, and subtly illuminates the psychology of the target audience. Disseminating values, exporting ideology, fabricating false information, setting issues, and inciting public opinion through social media to the "key audiences" in target countries have also become the usual tactics of some countries. Its purpose is to exert influence on a specific target group, shake or change its inherent cognition, and facilitate its external cognitive manipulation.

The US Department of Defense has also set up the Advanced Research Projects Agency, which aims to study the user activities of social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook, in order to control social emotions by manipulating information. According to media reports, the Pentagon not only monitors the comments of users of social networking sites on their accounts through the above-mentioned research projects, but also grasps their specific reactions to certain specific events.

Social media sites like Twitter and Facebook employ an algorithm to analyze words, phrases, or hashtags to create a list of topics sorted in order of popularity. This "trend list" is a quick way to review the most discussed topics at a given time. According to a 2011 study on social media, a trending topic "will capture the attention of a large audience for a short time" and thus "contributes to agenda setting mechanisms" (Sitaram Asur, Bernardo A. Huberman, Gabor Szabo, & Chunyan Wang, 2011). Using existing online networks in conjunction with automatic "bot" accounts, foreign agents can insert propaganda into a social media platform, create a trend, and rapidly disseminate a message faster and cheaper than through any other medium. Social media facilitates the spread of a narrative outside a particular social cluster of true believers by commanding the trend. It hinges on four factors: (1) a message that fits an existing, even if obscure, narrative; (2) a group of

true believers predisposed to the message; (3) a relatively small team of agents or cyber warriors; and (4) a network of automated "bot" accounts (Jarred Prier, 2017). Twitter trends can spread information to a broad group of people outside of a person's typical social network. Additionally, malicious actors can exploit trends to spread information across multiple platforms using multiple media formats, with the ultimate goal of gaining mainstream media coverage. Mastering trends is a powerful method of disseminating information, in the process of issue production and promotion, a closed loop of polyphonic communication is formed among government departments, Internet companies, think tanks and the media, brainwashing specific values through different channels and forms, and through the "meme" algorithm pushing to form a dominant frame with considerable traffic, so as to completely squeeze the expression space of "different" sounds. According to an article in the Guardian, "you can take an existing trending topic, such as fake news, and then weaponise it. You can turn it against the very media that uncovered it." (Carole Cadwalladr, 2017).

The Pentagon's strategic communications plan has penetrated social networking sites, a new step in its media campaign. DARPA is working on tools to help the U.S. government monitor information against U.S. interests. According to the researchers who have been exposed to the above-mentioned research projects, everyone on the Internet is seen as a potential factor that may spread information, so their job is to find the right person at a particular moment in order to spread information that is beneficial to the interests of the United States. The Pentagon has been running virtual intelligence programs in recent years to predict public reactions to its propaganda campaigns and to discredit and discredit activists, politicians and media personalities who point to them.

Conclusion

Every armed conflict has brawled on two fronts: on the battlefield and in the populace's minds via propaganda. Both good and bad media persons are frequently guilty of misleading and publishing false news to their constituents through falsifications, stereotypes, misunderstanding, and even manipulation to garner support and a sense of legitimacy. US media benefits US administration in its wars for an extended foreign policy agenda, and in reciprocity, get benefits for media houses businesses. Thus, US media reporting has evolved into a combination of deception, falsification, and manipulation. It is concluded that whether during times of war or not, media behaviour and practices are referred to as propaganda.

References

Carole Cadwalladr (2017). "Robert mercer: The big data billionaire waging war on the mainstream media", *Guardian*, Feb. 26, 2017, available online at: https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/feb/26/robert-mercer-breitbart-war-on-media-steve-bannon-donald-trump-nigel-farage.

Catherine A. Theohary (2018). "Information Warfare: Issues for Congress", *Congressional Research Service*, p. 2.

Collin Sparks (2007). "Extending and refining the propaganda model", *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture*, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 68–84.

Daoud Kuttab (2007). "The media and Iraq: a blood bath for and gross dehumanization of Iraqis", *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 89, No. 868, pp. 879–891.

David Barstow (2008). "Behind TV analysts, Pentagon's Hidden Hand", *New York Times*, Apr. 20, 2008, available online at: https://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/20/us/20generals.html.

David Shaw (1993). "Trust in media is on decline: The public frequently expresses the view that news outlets are biased and sensationalistic — Many journalists are also critical — and worried that they are viewed as unfair", Mar 31, 1993, available online at: https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-03-31-mn-17206-story.html+&cd=3&hl=zh-CN&ct=clnk&gl=hk.

Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky (2010). *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, Random House, pp. 10–40.

Gaye Tuchman (1972). "Objectivity as strategic ritual: An examination of newsmen's notions of objectivity", *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 77, No. 2, pp. 662–664.

Henry Michaels (2003). "Pentagon, media agree on Iraq war censorship", Mar 5, 2003, available online at: https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2003/03/med-m05.html (see Iraqi Forces Take Over Cities as U.S. Steps Back — Whitman interviewed by Public Service Television).

Jarred Prier (2017). "The command of the trend: Social media as a weapon in the information age", *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 11, No. 4, pp. 50–85.

Jean-Marc Rickli and Anja Kaspersen (2016). "The global war of narratives and the role of social media", Jul. 8, 2016, available online at: https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/07/the-global-war-of-narratives-and-the-role-of-social-media/.

Jim Mattis (2018). "Summary of the 2018 national defense strategy of the United States of America", Department of Defense Washington United States.

Joseph S. Nye Jr. (2003). "U.S. power and strategy after Iraq", *Foreign AFF.*, July/Aug. pp. 60, 67 ("Embedding reporters with forward military units undercut Saddam's strategy of creating international outrage by claiming that U.S. troops were deliberately killing civilians.").

Lewis A. Coser (1956). *The Functions of Social Conflict*, Routledge, p. 32.

Mark Fishman (1980). *Manufacturing the News*, University pf Texas Press, 1980, pp. 143, 145–146.

Mark Mazzetti and Borzou Daragahi (2005). "US military covertly pays company to place stories in Iraqi Press", *Los Angeles Times*, Nov 30, 2005, available online at: https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2005-nov-30-fg-infowar30-story.html.

Matthew Jacobs (1992). "Assessing the constitutionality of press restrictions in the Persian Gulf War", *Stanford Law Review*, Vol. 44, No. 3, pp. 686–687.

Phillip Knightley (1975). "The first casualty: From the Crimea to Vietnam — The war correspondent as hero, propagandist, and myth maker", Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Jan 1st, 1975, p. 206 (quoting Deputy Assistant Secretary of Public Affairs Bryan Whitman: "We looked for ways that could mitigate Saddam's lying, and of course, one of the things that came to mind . . . was to put independent objective observers throughout the battlefield.").

Sitaram Asur, Bernardo A. Huberman, Gabor Szabo, and Chunyan Wang (2011). "Trends in social media: Persistence and decay", unpublished manuscript, submitted to Cornell University Library arXiv, Feb. 7, 2011, available online at: https://arxiv.org/abs/1102.1402?context=physics.

William Marcellino, Meagan L. Smith, Christopher Paul, and Lauren Skrabala (2017). "Monitoring social media lessons for future department of defense social media analysis in support of information operations", Rand National Defense Research INST Santa Monica CA.