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POLITICAL COGNITIVE REPROGRAMMING AS A POLITICAL MARKETING COMMUNICATION STRATEGY FOR TRANSFORMING SOCIAL PERCEPTION⁴

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Abstract

Contemporary political communication increasingly functions through the formation of interpretative frameworks, and not only through the transmission of information. This paper discusses political cognitive reprogramming as a political-marketing communication strategy aimed at transforming social perception. It assumes that strategic narratives, enemy construction and digitally mediated communication act as tools to stabilize new patterns of meaning through which audiences interpret political reality. In the modern media environment, political marketing does not only serve to promote political actors, but actively reorganizes perception by shaping the way in which social actors and events are understood. Target groups are constantly exposed to specific narratives through digital communication, which gradually shape their political views, group identity, and assessments of legitimacy. By dividing, framing, and repeating narratives, political actors can change patterns of interpretation and normalize new distinctions between “us” and “them.” This article situates this process within the broader context of an evolving media environment whose ability to influence perception is enhanced by the decline of traditional intermediaries and the emergence of direct communication channels. At the level of sensemaking, political cognitive reprogramming is ultimately seen as a strategic mechanism that influences not only attitudes but also the cognitive structures used to perceive social and political reality.

Keywords: Political cognitive reprogramming, Strategic narratives, Digital political communication, Social perception, Political marketing

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1. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary political communication, the practice of building political narratives around specific enemy images is becoming increasingly prevalent. One of politics' defining traits, from which all political actions and motivations may be inferred, is the capacity to split a group along friend-enemy (we vs them) lines (Schmitt, 2008). Disinformation is a part of a real war of narratives, which are crucial elements in modern conflicts. More than just reporting, the media also create interpretive frameworks, legitimise players, and shape perceptions, all of which have the power to affect public opinion and political decision-making. These kinds of stories aim to emotionally energise listeners in divisive environments in addition to providing information (Weeks, 2023).

As political psychologists have shown, people often hold poor, unstable, inconsistent, and ignorant beliefs, and they are willing to change their expressions based on how issues are portrayed (Converse, 2000). Although people who lack complete information do use cognitive shortcuts to make decisions, whether they be political or not, framing theorists contend that people are deliberately selective about who and what they believe (Nelson et al., 1997). In this context, political communication does not only work at the informative level, but also at the level of reorganizing the interpretive frameworks through which individuals understand social reality. By using narratives, framing and selective presentation of information, it is possible to influence the stabilization of new meaning patterns, thereby changing the perception of political actors and events (Converse, 2000).

Contemporary conflicts take place concurrently on the military front, the domestic front, and the international front. Political, legal, and image aspects are all present in these areas. In the modern world, political actors' capacity to accomplish their objectives in the global arena is largely determined by their image; as a result, the image dimension has a substantial impact on both political and legal outcomes (Yarchi & Ayalon, 2023). Understanding the value of the image front as a battlefield, political players increasingly devote a significant amount of time and money to influencing public opinion in their favour and gaining worldwide legitimacy through the use of all accessible channels and communication instruments (Yarchi, 2025).

The Internet, social media, and satellite TV transformed the way information was shared. Bypassing traditional journalistic gatekeepers and enabling direct communication with target audiences, social media allows users and organisations to actively engage in the image war in this new environment where people are both information producers and consumers (Cull, 2011). Because first-hand experience is uncommon in international affairs, where most people rely on information from the media, people largely build their worldviews through mediated content (Soroka, 2003).

Mediated contents thus become key instruments in the process of redefining social reality, as they enable political actors to influence the way the audience categorizes social actors and evaluates the legitimacy of political decisions, which is the basis for a long-term transformation of perception (Yarchi & Ayalon, 2023). Therefore, political marketing can be used to shape and modify political messages, thereby influencing audience perception and behavior (Baltezarević et al., 2019).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Although it may appear at first glance that the rise in these enemy-constructive narratives is related to politicians' desire for short-term political advantage, such as mobilisation or an electoral edge, the phenomenon serves some vital purposes in the larger context of politics (Schlett, 2018). According to research on disinformation discourse in the media, the concept of disinformation terminology serves as a discursive framework with political and narrative weight in addition to describing different kinds of incorrect content (Buschman, 2024). Disinformation can be used as a weapon for attack or defence, depending on who uses it. However, unless the extent of the lies is clearly visible, disinformation has a stronger ability to influence opinions among neutral or hostile audiences but a smaller effect on devoted followers (Swire-Thompson et al., 2020).

In today's political climate, strategic narratives are essential tools used by political actors to try to influence reality. As sensemaking tools, they are used by political actors to frame public perceptions of policies and changing events and to capture the political essence of events. Political actors employ strategic narratives to create common identities and meanings on a national and international level, promote particular policies, and create legitimacy and support in order to further interests and values that align with their political objectives. It is precisely through strategic narratives that new interpretive schemes are stabilized that enable the redefinition of social relations and political identities, whereby communication ceases to be merely informative and becomes a mechanism of cognitive reorganization of the perception of reality (Miskimmon et al., 2015).

The significance and widespread use of strategic narratives in recent years, like the image war, are due to changes in the media landscape as well as sociological and political shifts. Communication between political players has changed significantly as a result of the new media ecology, particularly with the emergence of social media platforms (Howard, 2015).

It is essential to keep the political discourse focused on the fabricated enemy images because the speaker's activities against them are justified by the existence of the supposed foes. Maintaining the enemy image on the political agenda also helps with mobilisation since supporters are more readily mobilised when opposed to a

common foe who represents a (real or perceived) threat to the political community (Szabó Palócz, 2023). The construction of the enemy enables the stabilization of new boundaries between “us” and “them”, thus changing the way individuals interpret political reality and the legitimacy of the actions of political actors (Marchart, 2007).

In addition to helping to rally against those perceived adversaries, enemy-constructive political narratives can also justify measures done against them. Although these roles can be seen as natural components of politics rather than as recent inventions of modern political actors, we must also recognise that the current overuse of narratives centred on the enemy can, as Foa and Mounk (2016) explain in detail, undermine democratic processes. Both historical occurrences and people are altered to fit contemporary ideological demands in order to accomplish political objectives. In certain nations, history textbooks are more akin to literary fiction than to historical science since there is no clear distinction between historiography and literature (Marković, 2024).

Human group formation is incredibly flexible, as seen by the formation of clans, ethnic groups, states, and companies throughout human history. The evolutionary desire to improve survival and reproductive fitness is thought to be the genesis of groups in psychology (Reid, 2012). Through frequent encounters and communication, groups give people a sense of identity, belonging, meaning, situatedness, and shared social understandings. According to Fine (2012), idioculture is a system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviours, and practices that are unique to a group and reflect and refract a broader culture.

Human evolution, thousands of years of social and political experimentation, and the mechanisms of power have left behind the groupings that are essential to political existence and political communication (Graeber & Wengrow, 2021). The formation and redefinition of group identity through communication represents the basic mechanism of perception transformation, because it affects how individuals categorize social reality and their own position in it (Reid, 2012).

In the dissociative political sense, individuals are assigned group membership based on their birth, appearance, or assumed behavior: as an external “them” rather than as an internal “us” through hostility (Marchart, 2007). Even groups formed against their will may ultimately appear ontologically authentic (Williams, 2024) as subsequent group members adopt the group identity and use it for social and political organization. Just as social groups create politics through a continuous dynamic process, politics creates social groups. These factors are important because they operate at a level above the individual to create hierarchies of power and status, define group boundaries, and stabilize intergroup agreements.

Although it may seem like an appealing simplification, a politics of enemies has risks for those who engage in it. The sword kills those who live by it. Instead, portraying the conflict as a contest between rivals is highly advantageous to political rivals. After all, an adversary is an opponent who follows the same rules as you, accepts democratic results, congratulates you on your win, and, if they win, expresses gratitude for your participation in the competition. Furthermore, someone who is an enemy now could turn into a friend or ally later on (Ignatieff, 2022). Spicer (2025) claims that American polarisation is now a tool for the ruling class rather than a benefit to democracy. By portraying the Democratic and Republican parties as adversaries, it aims to undermine social cohesion rather than fostering political polarisation and permitting differing viewpoints. Republicans perceive Democrats as “enemies” of the country as a result of this behaviour, which leads to violent attacks on that group on social media.

The application of marketing principles and strategies to political objectives is known as political marketing. Politicians, political parties, and political movements all engage in political marketing, which is a basic aspect of contemporary politics. Market research, segmentation and targeting, branding, internal marketing, marketing communications, advertising, and relational marketing are just a few of the marketing activities that these organisations carry out. In today's conditions, political marketing functions not only as a means of promotion but also as an instrument of structuring perception through the selection and distribution of narratives that redefine the meaning of political events (Lees-Marshment, 2014).

Digital political communication can be used to strategically shape the perception of voters and change their attitudes, which enables the creation of targeted messages that transform social perception through controlled and precisely designed communication strategies (Baltezarević, 2026). Social media, in contrast to traditional media, offers political brands a direct and uncensored medium of communication. They enable political brands to engage voters with pertinent material, mobilise votes, seek campaign donations, communicate with their followers and the wider public, and advertise their brand on social media. Politicians can lessen their psychological distance from voters thanks to social media marketing, which is significant (Vergeer, 2011). Communication in a virtual environment, especially through digital networks and the Internet, significantly shapes the way in which information reaches users and influences their way of perception, thus opening up new opportunities for strategic messaging and influence on public opinion (Baltezarević & Baltezarević, 2020). A number of social, technological, and political upheavals over the last few decades have altered the global information landscape and changed how wars are fought and perceived. Globalisation and technical



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advancements simultaneously brought to the information era, which is defined by the continuous flow of data worldwide (Yarchi & Ayalon, 2023).

Digital communication channels enable the continuous exposure of target groups to certain narratives, which gradually changes their interpretive frames and stabilizes new perceptions of social reality (Vergeer, 2011). Internet users frequently label any contentious viewpoint or unpleasant exchange as trolling. Even though it might be challenging to prove intentional trolling, it is now typical to find anonymous or pseudonymous accounts that use trolling tactics as part of harassment campaigns. Trolling was eventually “weaponised” by governments and political figures to target the opposition, the media, and their adversaries. These days, trolling is a part of both military and information operations. Fake material can be produced in large quantities by troll farms and troll factories in Southeast Asia and minor European nations. As seen in Mexico's most recent presidential election, digital agencies in Latin America operate troll factories for electoral reasons. Professional trolling has become a worldwide industry. To disseminate their stories, troll factories create phoney websites and social media profiles. To spread their message, trolls also target particular communities and platforms. They function just like any other digital marketing agency, producing content and messages and carefully distributing them across channels to meet their objectives (Assardo, 2023).

3. CONCLUSION

Contemporary political communication no longer serves only for information, but shapes the ways in which citizens interpret social and political reality. Political cognitive reprogramming within political marketing functions as a strategy that through narratives, framing and selective distribution of information gradually changes the audience's perception and interpretive schemes.

Creating opposition and constant exposure to particular narratives can redefine social divisions and legitimize political actors. Digital channels further reinforce this influence, reducing the distance between politicians and the public and stabilizing new patterns of perception.

This process shows that political cognitive reprogramming does not only affect individual attitudes, but also changes collective frameworks of understanding and group identities. Repeated and strategically distributed communication enables the long-term adaptation of public opinion to new interpretive patterns.

Therefore, political cognitive reprogramming can be seen as a key mechanism for the transformation of social perception, but also as a challenge for ethical and democratic norms, because its application shapes not only opinions, but also the basic structures of perception of political reality.

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