

DEFENCE STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

Communicating Threat In An Era of Speed and Fetishised Technology

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NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence

Riga, Kalnciema iela 11b, Latvia LV1048

www.stratcomcoe.org

Ph.: 0037167335463

linda.curika@stratcomcoe.org

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FOREWORD

Suspension of disbelief occurs when theatre audiences embrace the actors' version of normality. Suspension of civil liberties happens when governments tell citizens their normality is at risk. Both require consensus, a collective will to buy into the story being told. But consensus conflates stories within stories, seducing us into a group understanding that blurs boundaries, that focuses on the moment. These have been troubling days for those engaged in strategic communications. The line between crisis communications and strategic communications has faded. The tactical has supplanted the strategic. Consequently, the short term task of securing people in danger stands increasingly at odds with retaining their compliance over the long term?

Strategic communicators' actions have spoken not simply to the health of families but to the well-being of the body politic. Politicians have addressed their populations with varying degrees of inclusion – a 'need to know' policy betrays precisely the kind of distrust of their citizens that governments have so feared from them. So it has often been left for individuals to explore the thoughts and feelings of their fellows and speak truth unto power. Many governments have held fast to 'the science' afraid to acknowledge that critical voices in the scientific community are what makes for good science. First lesson: drop the definite article – there is no 'the science', only science. Scholarship is founded on open conversation and peer review.

Lockdown in the Time of Covid has led us to reflect, to read, then to reflect some more. As we have searched for precedents in literature, partly seeking parallels, partly reassurance or comfort, to see how others endured suffering and how events transpired, we have consumed a mixed fayre of fact and fiction. From the detail of how historically populations have been slow to respond to the anticipated approach of epidemics, and governments even slower, the ups and downs of quarantining, misery, and societal recovery seem all too familiar. Not surprising perhaps that in Japan, Albert Camus's novel *The Plague* (*La Peste*) published in 1947 is reported to have sold 150,000 copies recently. While Camus was more concerned with the spread of the brown plague, fascism, his metaphor nevertheless captures in graphic detail how the inhabitants of Oran, in coastal Algeria, endured the suffering of months of quarantine. Earlier writers have been able to supply, if not solace, then a companionship in our isolation. Sophocles set his Oedipal tragedy against a backdrop of pestilence in Thebes. Daniel Defoe's *Diary of the Plague Year* and Samuel Pepys's *Diaries* offer a sense of what it was like to live and die during the Great Plague of the 1660s in England. While the Spanish Flu pandemic further darkened the close of the Great War, casting a shadow across the pages of the novelist Virginia Woolf. Most recently, Fang Fang's *Wuhan Diary: Dispatches from a Quarantined City*, first posted on the WeChat and Weibo social media platforms, brings an eye-witness account to contemporary suffering in the place where the Covid-19 virus originated in November 2019.¹

Where this introspection becomes more than contemplative – something beyond the maudlin, even beyond shock and anger – is where writers have speculated on what comes next. To what extent the aftermath of the global shutdown could presage a new order for economics or governance is of prime importance for both strategists and practitioners of strategic communications charged with shaping a 'new world'. Margaret MacMillan, an Oxford historian, observes:

‘...the coronavirus forces questions about what sort of future we want, what the proper role of government is and what makes a healthy society. We face a choice: to build better ways of dealing domestically and internationally with this challenge (and prepare for inevitable future ones) or let our world become meaner and more selfish, divided and suspicious.’²

1 Fang Fang, *Wuhan Diary: Dispatches from a Quarantined City* (HarperCollins, 2020)

2 *The Economist*, 9 May 2020

Woven into this choice is a tension that permeates today's geopolitics and consequently strategic communications that will shape future discourses.

At a time when being unprepared for the arrival of the virus in our countries has forced us to question the wisdom of relying on attenuated supply chains across the world, renewed anti-globalisation sentiment could lead to a surge in political nationalism and calls for economic protectionism and tariffs. Pulling against that is an appeal for scientists and pharmaceutical companies to pool resources in a global effort to find a vaccine for Covid-19 – an internationalist, even communitarian theme that has been echoed by numerous countries with the exception of the USA and China. How likely is it that governments with Big Pharma companies and populous domestic markets for vaccine and prophylactics will choose not to prioritise their domestic consumers? Will 'made here' become 'vaccinate here...first'? This pull and push between nationalistic self-reliance and caring-sharing internationalism can be read in other ways too. When even conservative governments have furloughed vast numbers of their population's workforce onto the public payroll, such emergency measures have been wrapped in the cloak of crisis communications. Whether born of accident or design, the revival of social democracy or even of a new social awareness has yet to materialise in concrete proposals. The responses to the crisis that we have witnessed may yet mark a revival in socialist politics, particularly among the young. More likely, this crisis will point to the adaptive nature of capitalism and its ability to roll with the punches as they rain in on the body politic.

The eminent historian Barbara Tuchman published *A Distant Mirror* over forty years ago. With a rigorous attention to archival detail, she captures the course of the Black Death, the bubonic plague of the 14th century. According to contemporary chroniclers, it accounted for deaths in one third of Europe's population, albeit such estimates could not be verified. The virus had been carried from China across land and sea and transmitted by fleas living on rats. The cause in those days, however, was widely attributed to miasma, the stench of foul air. Beyond the horrors of Tuchman's account, she too opens peoples' minds to a questioning that with the benefit of hindsight we can see contributed to a rearrangement of the social order. Tuchman notes:

'Survivors of the plague, finding themselves neither destroyed nor improved, could discover no Divine purpose in the pain they had suffered. God's purposes were usually mysterious, but this scourge had been too terrible to be accepted without questioning...

Minds that opened to admit these questions could never again be shut. Once people envisioned the possibility of change in a fixed order, the end of an age of submission came in sight; the turn to individual conscience lay ahead.’

And she goes onto suggest, ‘To that extent the Black Death may have been the unrecognised beginning of modern man.’³ As populations lay dying, the Enlightenment was being conceived, at least in some small part. For sure, the economics of labour were affected through a shortage of people to work the countryside, and consequently feudal obligations were by necessity reordered.

It is too early to assess what kind of new beginning will be prompted by the Covid-19 virus. Or whether any beginning will materialise. People adapt and memories can be short. We may yet witness a settling of account for governments deemed to have mishandled public policy. No amount of crisis communications could budge the perception of President George W. Bush in the public mind following his handling of the Hurricane Katrina crisis in 2005; it was encapsulated in one photograph of the Commander-in-Chief circling above the disaster zone of New Orleans: ‘That photo of me hovering over the damage suggested I was detached from the suffering on the ground. That is not how I felt. But once that impression was formed, I couldn’t change it.’⁴ Deeper changes in social attitudes and behaviour may take decades to materialise. How should strategic communications position itself for these shifts, seismic or discreet?

Much will depend on three developments. And all three are the stuff of strategic communications – a practice that claims to segment audiences but often neglects to segment its messages. The point is that a crisis such as Covid-19 is so overwhelming that it has stopped the world in its tracks; discussions of other problems become filtered through the lens of an extraordinary moment in history and either consciously or unconsciously suffused into a single conversation.

First, the Time of Covid is being instrumentalised to bring about a shift to political extremes. Consensus that grants extraordinary limits to personal freedoms and emergency powers to governments is granted in extremis, assuming a limited timescale; the public reasonably expects such measures to be repealed once

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 3 Barbara Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror* (London: Macmillan, p123)

4 George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (London: Virgin Books, 2010)

the worst is over. But the spread of illiberal politics within certain democracies sometimes by stealth, sometimes brazenly in the full light of day, has already led to concerns in the European Union, prompting conflicting responses to and within the Visegrád countries (V4). Victor Orbán's presidency in Hungary has come under restrained criticism from the European Union. The 30th March law allows Mr Orbán to rule by decree without consulting parliament until the end of the Covid crisis. In response, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen reproached Hungary's imposition of a state of emergency with extreme powers. Notwithstanding, parliament in Budapest has the constitutional power to repeal these extraordinary measures. That said, parliament also happens to be dominated by Mr Orbán's Fidesz party which occupies two-thirds of its seats. Meanwhile in Poland the government of Jarosław Kaczyński had already met with sanction from the European Commission over perceived attempts to undermine an independent judiciary, effectively declaring that anti-democratic measures would not be tolerated within the European Union. During Covid-19, the country's public policy has followed a similar course of adopting extraordinary measures; that fuels underlying fears of a more permanent shift to the extremes of democratic politics.

Second, the Time of Covid has provided a cover for disruption by stealth. During the virus crisis, monitoring of online conversations and storylines throughout social media revealed a sudden surge in disinformation, rumour and conspiracy gossip. Much has been attributed to Chinese and Russian sources although precise attribution is often difficult to pin down. Under cover of darkness, democratic states, already riven with internal fracture around political and economic challenges and now facing the 'lives versus livelihoods' dilemma raised by the virus, are assaulted by policies of destabilisation intended to disrupt the political status quo.

A consensus has emerged in recent years around strategic thinking behind disinformation that can be traced back to Russian sources. A systematic strategy on an industrial scale continues to feed an array of dissimilar stories into Western media channels and outputs. Experts differentiate increasingly between Ghostwriter messaging (using inauthentic local personas to disseminate fabricated articles) and Secondary Infektion (circulating fabricated stories online before amplifying them via social media platforms). These stories are understood to be part of a spoiling operation aimed at upsetting the equilibrium of democratic electorates. By reinforcing prejudice and group think within and

across communities, pre-existing fractures ranged around particular social and political points of contest become exacerbated. In this new climate, there is no single black or white, no absolute right or wrong. On the contrary, the more stories that circulate and more groups that become enslaved to their own group think, the greater the room for political fracture and social division. Intransigence is the name of the game. Cohesion is the target to be undermined. Despite repeated attempts by Western observers to 'out' Russian activity, surreptitious dissemination of enhanced and invented stories continues apace. They hide in open daylight. Rebuttals and denials by Russia's foreign ministry are little more than the choreography of diplomacy; they rehearse well-known steps and draw clear lines on the dance-floor.

Meanwhile, in this context, a report from Cardiff University's OSCAR team has revealed a surge in rumours about the relative merits of Paracetamol and Ibuprofen as prophylactics for Covid-19 symptoms.⁵ What the authors call 'soft facts' contributed to a run on Paracetamol supplies as doubts surrounding Ibuprofen were passed down a social media chain of opinions (WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Reddit, mainstream media, and for good measure, one academic journal). Underlying these doubts was, nevertheless, a trace of truth, according to its researchers: hence 'soft facts'. The effect was to misinform publics already alarmed about the crisis within a broader disinformation strategy (disseminating deliberately erroneous information). The spread of this misinformation (unwitting passing on of erroneous or only partly inaccurate material) is difficult to trace back to Russia. However, such rapid dissemination illustrates how stories can proliferate, never mind hide in plain site. Where misinformation and disinformation overlap becomes a question of intent (not easy to substantiate) rather than simply effect (equally difficult to prove).

So first, the Time of Covid is being instrumentalised to bring about a shift in political extremes. Second, the Time of Covid is being used as a cover for disruption by stealth. And third, the Time of Covid has intensified the confusion of all consequent issues into a single story of threat.

China and the USA have engaged in a struggle to attach blame for the origin and spread of the virus which has wrought severe consequences on human life and national economies. Accusations and counter-accusations form part of a

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⁵ *Rumours about the Efficacy of Ibuprofen V's Paracetamol in Treating Covid-19 Symptoms: The Making of a Misinformation 'Soft Fact' with Public Health Impact*, (OSCAR, Cardiff University, 2020)

broader contest between the two powers as they compete for future hegemony. At stake here is what communicators might term geo-optics. The balancing act between the public diplomacy of Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative and its use of aggression in the South China Sea against its neighbours is never far from these discussions. What on the surface is a blame game conducted in public, risks taking on greater meaning because it becomes institutionalised in the approaching US presidential election with an incumbent Donald Trump and presumptive Democrat candidate Joe Biden both vying for who looks best qualified to put America first when threatened by what they perceive as a malign China intent on putting China first.

We face a conflation of stories here. Each is distinctive in its political context and worthy of separate consideration. Story 1: for some time, the US has been fearful of the rise of China under President Xi. An Asia-Pacific regional hegemon threatens to become a global hegemon not just through its spectacular economic growth but also through the expansion of its military power.

Story 2: Beijing has been disingenuous in projecting One Belt One Road as simply a force for good – a soft power initiative connecting China via trade routes by land and sea to markets as far afield as western Europe. What exactly is China's intentions?

Story 3: By contrast, Beijing's sustained militarisation of the South China Sea and disregard for international judicial rulings in favour of the Philippines on China's claims to the South China Sea and its interpretation of the Nine-Dash Line suggest a rejection of the rules based system. This has been fuelled by massive expansion of its armed forces. American commitments to protect friendly states like Japan and Taiwan are at risk. And it's a real risk, argue experts at the Washington based Centre for Strategic and International Studies: 'Every simulation that has been conducted looking at the threat from China by 2030, and there have been various ones carried out, for example in the event of China invading Taiwan, have all ended up with the defeat of the US.'⁶ By this analysis, the so-called Thucydides Trap, described by Harvard's Graham Allison appears to gain substance.

Story 4: The Chinese Communist Party has not been open in accepting its responsibility for mishandling the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly at a local

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⁶ Michael Evans, US 'would lose any war' fought in the Pacific with China, *The Times*, 16 May 2020, p. 36.

level. Its central government has fabricated accounts of the infection emanating from a US military visit to Wuhan in 2019. Meanwhile it is accused of buying influence with the WHO to whitewash its initial dilatory and latterly self-laudatory performance.

Story 5: Tightening civil freedoms because of the virus has become a screen for repressive measures on its Uighur Muslim population of which as many as a million are widely reported to be incarcerated in concentration or re-education camps. In the fog of Covid, the eyes of the world turn to domestic concerns. Hong Kong's citizens find themselves on the brink of losing their One Country, Two Systems constitutional status Deng Xiaoping set in motion some forty years ago – a system of governance internationally recognised when the British departed their colony in 1997. Force has replaced persuasion. What is the real story? The end of Hong Kong's relative independence as the democratic world looks on or the beginning of Taiwan's demise and testing of Western democratic resolve to come to the support of either?

Story 6: The US presidential election is being shaped around which candidate can best weld 'Made in America' to 'America First' politics. A desire to shorten trans-global supply chains plays well to an agenda that would impose tariffs on Chinese imports and protecting jobs at home. Meanwhile safeguarding the nation means redefining pandemics beyond the overly constrained military definition of national security, a shift in thinking that NATO has already broached in its Strategic Foresight Analysis Report, 2017.

Story 7: Any citizen of a democratic society should think twice before being drawn to the lure of Chinese state efficiency in quarantining its population, before reducing its reported case load. 'For all we know the flow of misinformation is continuing today', writes Francis Fukuyama in a recent essay.⁷ 'It is wrong to hold up the CCP's totalitarian approach in dealing with the virus as a model to be emulated by other countries. Nearby South Korea and Taiwan, both healthy liberal democracies, achieved even better results in the pandemic without the draconian methods used by China.'

Earlier I mentioned the Chinese intellectual Fang Fang (pen name for Wang Fang). Now published as a book, her diary entry for 21 February 2020 records, 'A new group of government leaders to spearhead the fight against the outbreak

⁷ Francis Fukuyama, 'What Kind of Regime Does China Have?', *The American Interest*, 18 May 2020.

has arrived, and they have begun to correct the feeble and sluggish response of their predecessors.’ In *Development as Freedom* Nobel prizewinning economist Amartya Sen crystallises why multiparty democracies with a free press never suffer famine – famine understood as a man-made crisis, not one of nature. Sen contrasts autocratic China’s response to its famines between 1958 and 1961 with democratic India’s absence of famine even while it suffered severe food shortages in 1968, 1973, 1979, and 1987. ‘The lack of a free system of news distribution also misled the government itself, fed by its own propaganda and by rosy reports of local party officials competing for credit in Beijing.’⁸

His argument sits within a broader framework: ‘Famines kill millions of people in different countries in the world, but they don’t kill the rulers’, writes Sen. ‘The kings and the presidents, the bureaucrats and the bosses, the military leaders and the commanders never are famine victims. And if there are no elections, no opposition parties, no scope for uncensored public criticism, then those in authority don’t have to suffer the political consequences of their failure to prevent famines. Democracy, on the other hand, would spread the penalty of famines to the ruling groups and political leaders as well. This gives them the political incentive to try to prevent any threatening famines, and since famines are in fact easy to prevent (the economic argument clicks into the political one at this stage), the approaching famines are firmly prevented.’⁹ We are reminded of Dr Li Wenliang, ophthalmologist at the Wuhan Central Hospital. He would die of the Covid-19 virus, having posted a message warning of a new unknown disease before he was pressured to sign a retraction by Public Security Bureau officials for ‘making false comments’. Nevertheless, in the daily contest for dominance in global public opinion, the success of strategic communications is not solely determined by the other side’s actions but by the values one projects. Professor Fukuyama again: ‘While democracies as a group have not done worse than authoritarian governments in controlling the crisis, China is able to present itself as having outperformed the United States, and that bilateral comparison is the one that people are paying attention to around the world right now.’

If the political maxim of ‘never waste a good crisis’ is to hold water, then we should expect to see some adversaries make gains at the expense of their opponents when the virus abates. But we should be under no illusion, the ground work is being firmly put in place now. The prize is public opinion. We are witnessing a strategic

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⁸ Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 181.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

communications contest being played out. Who gets to shift long term discourses and to whose advantage – the *sine qua non* of any strategic communications definition – could yet change the way we think and live.

Volume 8 of Defence Strategic Communications picks up some of these themes while offering respite for other weary souls. Dr Thomas Colley reflects on how better to assess the presumed impact of disinformation and whether it is time to rethink how governments should respond in order to shape fresh policy thinking. A collaboration between research teams at the Beedie Business School, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver and the King's Business School, London offers a bibliographic survey of the literature around 'Fake News'; they aim to inform policy makers of the current state of academic conversation around this confused area of debate. David Siman-Tov and Dr Ofer Fridman inquire whether Israel pursues strategic communications even if it chooses not to adopt the term. In so doing they examine three key concepts—*hasbara*, public diplomacy, and cognitive campaign—and attempt to distinguish 'a rose by any other name'. To offer an historical perspective on the study of strategic communications, Dr Ignacio Cardone analyses how in the early 20th century Argentina and Chile used territorial claims to Antarctica to contest and exert each state's national identity. The white continent became the field of contest for a strategic communications struggle where the author reminds us 'geography is anything but neutral'.

Defence Strategic Communications has contributed to providing a platform for thought-provoking essays. This volume continues that vein. Professor Nancy Snow reflects on the nature of Japan's weak strategic communications demonstrated during the Covid-19 crisis by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's government. It might all have been so different in the year of the Tokyo Olympics, you might have thought. Professor Snow questions Japan's weak showing and draws on J. William Fulbright's plea that to succeed 'we need objective perceptions of our own fears and hopes and a broader perspective about our own society, our relations with others and our place in the world.' Life, specifically machines, seems to be getting relentlessly faster, suggests former BBC Africa correspondent Karen Allen. She is concerned about the way our societies have become obsessed with speed and how that is attached to a fetishising of technologies, sometimes to our advantage but worryingly also to our detriment. Where does this tendency lead, where does it end? Alex Lawrence-Archer, the UK Government's head of Data Ethics and Innovation, picks his way through the thorny field of AI (artificial intelligence): 'two letters, many meanings'. How to make this confusion more intelligible to non-expert

audiences is the challenge data ethics now faces if the positive benefits of data based technologies are not to be overwhelmed by the heavy baggage of historic associations and misunderstandings.

In these difficult times, we wish our readers and contributors good health and a renewed ability to discern the wheat from the chaff.

Dr Neville Bolt, Editor-in-Chief
Spring 2020

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A ROSE BY ANY OTHER NAME? STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS IN ISRAEL

David Siman-Tov and Ofer Fridman

Abstract

The term strategic communications is missing from the Israeli academic and professional discourse. Instead, there are three different conceptual approaches to state communication in Israel—*hasbara*, public diplomacy, and cognitive campaign. Analysing the history of the development and employment of these three concepts, this article makes two contributions important for the field of strategic communications. First, it analyses how Israel has found itself with various approaches; why it does not have one comprehensive framework; and whether any of the three approaches can be considered the equivalent of 'Israeli strategic communications'. Second, based on the case of Israel, it establishes the need for states to have an exhaustive conceptual framework to conduct strategic communications and the consequences of the absence of such a framework.

Keywords—*strategic communications, strategic communication, Israel, Hasbara, public diplomacy, cognitive campaign*

About the Authors

David Siman-Tov is a Research Fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) at Tel Aviv University, Israel. His recent publication is *The Cognitive Campaign: Strategic and Intelligence Perspectives* (INSS, 2019) co-edited with Yossi Kuperwasser.

Dr Ofer Fridman is Director of Operations at the King's Centre for Strategic Communications (KCSC) and a Lecturer at the Department of War Studies, King's College London.

Introduction¹

In the Western academic and professional communities, the term 'strategic communications' (SC) has long been conceptualised as an operational art conducted by states and governments in pursuit of their national interests. However, regardless of the extensive literature in the field and the worldwide practice of SC, there is neither a unified definition, nor agreed understanding of what SC entails.

On the scholarly front, Christopher Paul defines SC as 'coordinated actions, messages, images, and other forms of signalling or engagement intended to inform, influence, or persuade selected audiences in support of national objectives'.² According to James Farwell, SC includes 'the use of words, actions, images, or symbols to influence the attitudes and opinions of target audiences to shape their behaviour in order to advance interests or policies, or to achieve objectives'.³ A more specific definition is offered by Neville Bolt, who argues that SC entails 'the projection of foreign and security policies aimed at changing the attitudes and behaviour of targeted audiences to achieve strategic effects, using words, images, actions and non-actions in the national interest'.⁴

On the institutional front, the number of the definitions for SC is as large as the number of institutions active in this field. The US government (USG) defines SC as:

The focused USG efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen, and preserve conditions for the advancement of USG interests, policies, and objectives through the use of coordinated programs, plans, themes, messages, and products synchronized with the actions of all instruments of national power.⁵

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1 The authors would like to thank Amos Hervitz and Roy Shulman from the INSS for assistance with material collection and writing of the study.

2 Christopher Paul, *Strategic Communication*, (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2011), p. 17.

3 James Farwell, *Persuasion and Power: The Art of Strategic Communication*, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012), pp. xvii–xix.

4 Neville Bolt, 'Foreword', *Defence Strategic Communications*, Vol. 6, Spring 2019, p. 4.

5 *United States Government Compendium of Interagency and Associated Terms*, (Washington DC, November 2019), p. 925.

Other examples of different definitions can be seen across military organisations that consider themselves as conducting SC on their own. The UK Ministry of Defence defines SC as efforts to advance ‘national interests by using Defence as a means of communication to influence the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of audiences’,⁶ and NATO defines SC as ‘the coordinated and appropriate use of NATO communications activities and capabilities in support of Alliance policies, operations and activities, and in order to advance NATO’s aims’.⁷

While these definitions offer slightly different understandings of the nature and character of SC, it seems right to argue that they all comprise several major elements: a **coordinated/coherent** use of **all means of communication** (words, images, actions) to **influence targeted audiences** in pursuit of **political interests**. Following this understanding, this article adopts the definition offered by the StratCom Terminology Project. There are two reasons that justify this choice. First, the aim of this project is to clarify terms and make them accessible to the wider community of strategic communicators. Second, and more important, it offers the most comprehensive and thought-through rationale behind the proposed definitions.⁸ According to the StratCom Terminology Project, SC represents ‘a holistic approach to communication based on values and interests that encompasses everything an actor does to achieve objectives in a contested environment’.⁹

Keeping this definition in mind, this article aims to answer an important question regarding the discourse on the nature and character of SC—Does a state need an exhaustive and coherent conceptual framework to conduct strategic communications?

In analysing Russian conceptual discourse on the role of words, images, and actions deployed by the Russian government, Ofer Fridman argues that the Kremlin conducts successful SC, even if it does not define its actions as such.¹⁰ Yet, the Russian conceptualisation of ‘information war’ [*informatzionnaya voyna*] seems to be comprehensive enough to offer a requisite theoretical framework

6 *Joint Doctrine Note 2/19. Defence Strategic Communication: an Approach to Formulating and Executing Strategy*, (London: Ministry of Defence, 2019), p. 4.

7 ‘About Strategic Communications’, NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, (accessed 25 January 2020).

8 Neville Bolt and Leonie Haiden, *Improving NATO Strategic Communications Terminology*, (Riga, Latvia: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, June 2019).

9 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

10 Ofer Fridman, “‘Information War’ as the Russian Conceptualisation of Strategic Communications”, *The RUSI Journal*, Vol. 165, N° 1, 2020.

for SC in the historical, cultural, and socio-political context of Russia.¹¹

Israel, like Russia, does not conceptualise its activities in terms of SC. However, unlike Russia, it does not have any other comprehensive concept that unifies Israel's use of words, images, and actions to influence the political behaviour of targeted audiences in order to advance national interests. Israeli strategic culture, dominated by creative doers, rather than creative thinkers, is predisposed towards finding ingenious solutions to individual problems, rather than developing holistic concepts that would address a series of similar problems as a whole. Therefore, instead of having one comprehensive approach towards its communications, Israel simultaneously employs a range of different terms, concepts, and approaches.

One of the oldest terms in the Israeli discourse is *hasbara*. While in its literal translation *hasbara* means 'explaining', its exact meaning can also be interpreted as 'advocacy'¹² or even as Israel's propaganda, as Giora Goodman put it:

The term 'propaganda' acquired a pejorative sense during the first half of the twentieth century. Accordingly, British and American propagandists used 'information' to describe their work and the positive-sounding word *hasbara* has generally been preferred in Hebrew.¹³

In the last two decades, Israel has been trying to replace the conceptual framework of *hasbara* with *medini'ut tziburit* [public diplomacy].¹⁴ This implies that *hasbara* is different from public diplomacy, creating a need to understand the differences between the two concepts.

While the concepts of *hasbara* and public diplomacy have been shaping the theoretical debates and practical experience in Israel for several decades, another concept—cognitive campaign [*hama'araba al batoda'a*]¹⁵—has recently joined the discourse. Conceptualised in the context of military activities, the aim of a cognitive campaign, according to Israeli experts, is 'to cause target audiences

11 Ofer Fridman, 'The Russian Perspective on Information Warfare: Conceptual Roots and Politicisation in Russian Academic, Political, and Public Discourse', *Defence Strategic Communications*, Vol. 2, Spring 2017, pp. 61–86; Fridman, 'Information War'.

12 Gary Rosenblatt, "'Hasbara' Goes Prime Time', *The Jewish Week*, 12 March 2003, (accessed 26 January 2020).

13 Giora Goodman, "'Palestine's Best': The Jewish Agency's Press Relations, 1946–1947", *Israel Studies*, Vol. 16, N° 3, 2011, p. 22.

14 See: *Israeli Hasbara: Myths and Facts: A Report on the Israeli Hasbara Apparatus 2012* (Jerusalem: Molad-The Center for the Renewal of Israeli Democracy, 2012).

to adopt the perception of reality held by the side wielding the effort, so that it can more easily advance the strategic and/or operational objectives that it sees as critical'.¹⁵

This article explores the three concepts used in Israel to describe the deployment of deeds, words, and images to influence the political behaviour of targeted audiences in order to advance national interests—*hasbara*, public diplomacy, and cognitive campaign. Analysing Israel's approaches to communication, this article aims to examine how Israel has found itself with various approaches and why it does not have a single comprehensive framework for its SC.

Part One: Hasbara

The term *hasbara* is unique to Israel and stems from the country's perceived status and effort to convince the world of its historical justice.¹⁶ The main aim of *hasbara* is to convey a specific narrative to the desired audience in an attempt to sway public opinion on a particular political issue related to Israel. *Hasbara* is responsive and not proactive in nature, aiming to explain political-security actions in an attempt to gain support and legitimacy. Its activities can be carried out by state agencies (various government ministries), the military, and state-affiliated NGOs.¹⁷

Immediately after the establishment of Israel, Moshe Sharett, the first Minister of Foreign Affairs, planned to set up a Bureau of Hasbara. This plan, however, never materialised, as the majority of decision-makers in Israel at this time disregarded the importance of information interaction with international institutions, placing a greater emphasis on actions rather than words. Established with the support of all major powers and a deep internal sense of justice, Israel did not feel the need to explain itself to the world, or to justify its actions. Israel's victory in the 1948 War of Independence was seen by the world as a stand of 'few against many', and Israel was endorsed by the majority of countries. Moreover, the successful absorption of immigrants from around

15 Yossi Kuperwasser and David Siman-Tov, 'Preface', in Yossi Kuperwasser and David Siman-Tov, (eds), *The Cognitive Campaign: Strategic and Intelligence Perspectives*, (Tel-Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), The Institute for the Research of the Methodology of Intelligence (IRMI), 2019), p. 7.

16 Ron Schleifer, 'Jewish and Contemporary Origins of Israeli Hasbara', *Jewish Political Studies Review*, Vol. 15, 2003, p. 123.

17 *Israeli Hasbara: Myths and Facts: A Report on the Israeli Hasbara Apparatus 2012*, (Jerusalem: Molad—The Centre for the Renewal of Israeli Democracy, 2012); Yegar Moshe, 'He'arot al sherut ha-huts shel Yisrael' [Remarks on the Foreign Service of Israel], Opinion Paper N° 160, (Sha'arei Tikva: The Ariel Centre for Policy Research (ACPR), 2005); *Diplomatya Tziburit be'Israel* [The Public Diplomacy of Israel], Samuel Neaman Institute, Technion University, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Israel, 2009.

the world, the establishment of kibbutz communities, the development of the Negev desert, and the creation of an independent military complex—all these actions aggregated international support with no need for further explanation or justification.¹⁸

The first attempt to conduct *hasbara* activities took place in the early 1960s, when the IDF (Israel Defence Forces) Intelligence Corps established the Department for Security and Hasbara. The department's aim was to control and coordinate the release of information to journalists and to the general public. However, the department was disbanded in the late 1960s, when the responsibility for *hasbara* was transferred from the Intelligence Corps to the newly established IDF Spokesman's Unit.¹⁹

Israel's military victories in the Six-Day War in 1967 and the Yom Kippur War in 1973 completely changed the way Israel was perceived by the international community. From the small 'David', which barely won its independence in 1948, Israel twice defeated significantly superior Arab militaries, emerging as a regional 'Goliath' occupying newly conquered territories. Moreover, the decolonisation process added many new sovereign Arab and Muslim states to the international community, who subsequently intensified international criticism of Israel's policies. Facing the rise of international criticism, Israel found itself in a new situation, trying to explain and justify its actions.

The overwhelming success in the Six Day War and increasing international criticism forced the Israeli leadership to rethink its whole approach to *hasbara* activities. This led to the establishment of the Ministry of Hasbara in 1974. While the main aim of the ministry was to coordinate the activities of all actors involved in the *hasbara* effort, it did not survive long enough to achieve any real progress. Approximately one year after its establishment, the ministry was closed due to inter-ministerial competition and bureaucratic rivalries.²⁰

18 See Jonatan Manor, 'Kishalon ha'asbara or kishalon ha'mediniyut?' [A Failure of the Hasbara or a Failure of the Policy?], in Benjamin Gronik and Arie Noberger (eds), *Medinut Hut: Bein imut le'esderim—Israel 1948–2008* [The Foreign Policy between Conflict and Agreement—Israel 1948–2008], Vol. B, (Ra'anana: The Open University of Israel, 2008); Sharon Pedro, *Utzma raka ke'nebes leumi* [Soft Power as a National Asset], (Jerusalem: The Jewish People Policy Planning Institute, 2004).

19 Ephrayim Lapid, 'Dover tzal modiya: mi'mlhemet atzmaut ve'ad edan hatwitter' [IDF Spokesperson Announces: From the War of Independence to the Age of Twitter], *IsraelDefense*, 17 September 2019 (accessed 7 April 2020).

20 Nachman Shai, *Milkhamedia* [Media War], (Tel Aviv: Yediot Ahronot, 2013), p. 116.

The peak of the Arab states' efforts to delegitimise Israel came in 1975 when the UN General Assembly passed a resolution that determined that 'Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination'.²¹ The response of Israel's Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was simple:

The U.N. lost its ethical and political validity and became a battlefield for wrangling and harassment that have no connection, what so ever, with the principles and ideals for which it was established.²²

This was a turning point in Israel's approach to addressing the problem of its negative image. The uncoordinated and ineffective *hasbara* activities intended to explain and justify its policies were replaced by a general disdain for international criticism that it saw as biased against Israel.²³

This approach started to change during the First Intifada (1987–93). This was a new type of conflict for Israel, which was used to engaging in wars against conventional armies or terrorist organisations. For the first time, Israel's control over the message was undermined by the Palestinians, who maintained close relations with foreign journalists. This situation created a great challenge to the *hasbara* activities Israel engaged in to justify its actions against the Palestinians.²⁴

At the end of the 1990s, following the report of the State Comptroller about the failure to address international criticism of Israel's actions during the 1996 Operation Grapes of Wrath in Lebanon, Israel's government decided to establish the National Hasbara Forum with the aim of coordinating Israel's *hasbara* abroad. The Forum, however, similar to previous attempts to coordinate *hasbara* activities across different agencies and institutions, ran into the difficulties of inter-ministerial competition.²⁵

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21 Resolution 3379: Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, UN General Assembly, New York, 10 November 1975; Efraim Inbar, *Israel eina merudelet* [Israel Is not Isolated] (Tel-Aviv: Begin-Sadat Centre for Strategic Studies, 2013); Manor, 'Kishalon ha'asbara or kishalon ha'medinyut?' [A Failure of the Hasbara or a Failure of the Policy?], p. 65–68.

22 Yitzhak Rabin, *Speech in the Knesset Regarding the U.N. General Assembly Resolution from 10 November 1975 about Zionism*, 11 November 1975 (Hebrew), published in Inbal Telem, Shmuel Tzvaog, and Benjamin Noberger (eds), *Medinyut ha'butz shel Israel—kovetz mismachim* [The Foreign Policy of Israel—Documents Collection], Vol. A., (Ra'anana: The Open University of Israel, 2004), p. 352.

23 Ofer Fridman, *Enemy Civilian Casualties: Politics, Culture and Technology*, (Ilanham: Lexington Books, 2019), p. 122–32.

24 Shai, *Milkhamedia* [Media War], p. 129.

25 Ibid., p. 130–31.

The Second Intifada (2000–05) was another milestone where Israel's *hasbara* failed to perform. This Intifada was perceived by the international community as a legitimate resistance and the Israelis were seen as oppressors. Any deployment of force by the IDF was criticised as disproportionate, and the number of Palestinian civilian casualties, which included many children, made Israel's attempts to explain and justify its actions far more difficult. In addition, the dynamics of the interaction with foreign media had changed. In the past, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other governmental agencies explained the policy, and the IDF Spokesman's Unit explained military activities on the ground. However, during the Intifada, the foreign media grew tired of laconic explanations provided by Israeli officials and went straight to military commanders on the ground. Since the commanders were not trained to deal with media, their interaction with journalists was incoherent, inconsistent, and frequently contradicted the general direction set up by Israel's *hasbara*.²⁶

The next challenge faced by the Israeli *hasbara* was the 2006 Second Lebanon War. Aggressive and well polished speeches by Hezbollah's leader Hassan Nasrallah before, during, and after the war, and the evident failure of Israeli *hasbara* to leverage military success on the battlefield into diplomatic achievements, shaped the perception of Israel's defeat in this war.²⁷ As a result, the State Comptroller devoted a special report to Israel's *hasbara* efforts, recommending that a National Information Directorate under the Prime Minister's Office be established. In its report, the State Comptroller stated:

The absence of an overarching state *Hasbara* concept and the lack of proper coordination between institutions responsible for *Hasbara*, which resulted from the absence of government's guidance through a permanent supervisor that provides instruction and coordination, have caused an inherent *Hasbara* failure of Israeli governments.

Furthermore, the report argued that:

The Prime Minister's Office is the only body that has the overall vision of Israel's *Hasbara* needs vis-a-vis both internal messaging

26 Giora Eiland, 'The IDF in the Second Intifada', *Strategic Assessment*, Vol. 13, N° 3, 2010, p. 27–37.

27 Yarden Vatikai, 'Tifkud hadiplomatiya hatziburit ha'israelit' [The Performance of Israel's Public Diplomacy], at the conference *Tikshoret beinleumit b'mivtza tzik eitan* [International Communications during the Operation Protective Edge], Bar-Ilan University, 23 November 2014, (Video), (accessed 8 April 2020); Shai, *Milkhamedia* [Media War], p. 10.

aimed at the Israeli public and external messaging. Therefore, it is imperative that it coordinates the national *Hasbara* apparatus in times of emergency and prepares it in times of respite.²⁸

In line with these recommendations, the National Hasbara Commission was established in the Prime Minister's Office. The Commission oversaw the National Information Directorate and the Government Press Office, aiming to 'coordinate all *Hasbara* bodies of the State of Israel in order to present a credible, uniform and consistent *Hasbara* policy'.²⁹ In order to fulfil its role, the head of the National Information Directorate was invited to participate as a permanent member at meetings of the Cabinet, the Ministerial Committee on National Security, and other high-level sessions relevant for the field of *hasbara*.

In addition, it was decided to re-establish the National Hasbara Forum responsible for determining Israeli *hasbara* policy. In an attempt to avoid previous mistakes, the Forum included the Head of the National Information Directorate and his deputy, the Deputy Director of Hasbara and Communications at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, communications advisers to the Minister of Defence, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Minister of Interior Affairs, the spokespersons for these ministries, the IDF Spokesperson, the Spokesperson of the Israel Police, and a representative of the Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet).³⁰

According to Yarden Vatikai, the former head of the National Information Directorate, the field of *hasbara* has been fully coordinated with decision-making, as the National Information Directorate is integrated into both the formal and informal decision-making processes, influencing policy and not just explaining it *post factum*. The Directorate presents *hasbara* implications for policy, and the Cabinet takes these considerations into account when making decisions.³¹

However, regardless of this evident success in integrating *hasbara* within the decision-making process, the concept continued to be a target of extensive criticism in Israel for its failure to systematically address the problem of negative international opinion. In addition to more repetitive criticism expressed by the State Comptroller, scholars and professionals alike have criticised the

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28 *Aspects of Preparedness of Hasbara Bodies and Their Functioning in the Second Lebanon War* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: State Comptroller of Israel, January 2007).

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Yarden Vatikai, 'The State's Strategic Effort', at the conference *The Cognitive Campaign: Gaza as a Case Study*, INSS, 25 June 2018, (Video), (accessed 8 April 2020).

government for its failure to create unified and effective *hasbara* activities.³²

According to former IDF Spokesperson Brigadier General (Ret.) Avi Benayahu, the concept of *hasbara* lacked the sophistication to change and shape the perception of reality. It offered a one-dimensional solution to a multi-dimensional problem. Since *hasbara* is conducted *post factum*, the speed of information distribution in the contemporary digital age rendered any *post factum* explanations useless.³³ Another former IDF Spokesperson, recently retired Brigadier General (Res.) Ronen Manelis, simply stated that ‘The time of *Hasbara* is over.’³⁴ According to him, contemporary challenges require information activities that constitute a complex complementary effort for political or military activities, and not *hasbara* that simply focuses on explanation and justification.³⁵ Alongside the criticism of *hasbara* in Israel, it has also been constantly criticised internationally, leading to a search for an alternative concept in the IDF, as well as in the civil service.

Part Two: Cognitive Campaign

Until the beginning of the 2000s, two concepts were prevalent in the IDF: *hasbara* and psychological warfare. Similar to other militaries in the world, the IDF considered psychological warfare as a way to influence perceptions held by enemy soldiers and commanders, mostly through the use of deception and disinformation.³⁶ Since the 1950s, psychological warfare in the IDF has been divided into two levels—strategic and tactical. While, in theory, the strategic level was aimed at ‘the enemy in his entirety, on the front and in the rear’, in practice, the IDF never employed strategic psychological warfare, but has focused on the tactical level only.³⁷

Tactical psychological warfare was defined as an operation ‘directed against enemy units on the battlefield, in combination with clearly defined combat

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32 Melaié Phillips in an interview on ‘Roim Ulam’ [See the World], *Channel 1*, 10 January 2011, (Video), (accessed: 8 April 2020); Yair Lapid quoted in ‘Lapid: yesh lanu koah, mamash lo zukum le’Olmert’ [Lapid: We have the power, there is no need for Olmert], *Makor Rishon*, 18 July 2012, (accessed 8 April 2020).

33 Avi Benayahu, ‘Milkhemet ha’asbara be’idan hadigitali’ [The Hasbara War in the Digital Age], *Ma’arachot*, N° 445, 2012, p. 4–9.

34 Ron Ben Yishai, ‘Milkhemet hatoda’a shel dover tzal’ [The Cognitive War of the IDF Spokesperson], *Ynet*, 13 September 2019, (accessed 8 April 2020).

35 Ibid.

36 Rave Galili, ‘Ha’Ma’araha she’bein milkhamot ve’ha’ma’amatz ha’ne’elam’ [The Campaign between the Wars and the Invisible Effort], *Bein Haktavim*, 22–23, 2019, p. 75–91.

37 David Siman-Tov and Shay Hershkovitz, *Aman yotze le’or*, [Military Intelligence Comes to the Light], (Tel-Aviv: Ma’arachot, 2013).

operations'.³⁸ In many cases, IDF psychological warfare targeted an adversary's intelligence agencies—those tasked with interpreting reality for their decision makers. Therefore, in the IDF, psychological warfare has sometimes been referred to as intelligence warfare.³⁹ Due to the differing natures of *hasbara* and psychological warfare, the two approaches were organised separately (through the IDF Spokesperson's Unit for *hasbara* and through the Military Intelligence Corps for psychological warfare) without any conceptual coordination or agency cooperation.

In the early 2000s, the IDF started to focus on the cognitive component of military actions. This focus was driven by a number of interconnected developments. First, the IDF began to realise that its opponents (the weaker sides in asymmetric conflicts) were trying to achieve their goals through a 'massive use of psychological warfare'.⁴⁰ Second, the IDF Central Command responsible for the Judea and Samaria Area also realised that the opinions of the Palestinian and Israeli publics constituted a critical element in its success.⁴¹

According to the former Chief of Staff Lieutenant General (Ret.) Moshe Ya'alon, this focus on the cognitive dimension led to a number of transformations. First, it led to changes in operational decision-making seeking to deprive the Palestinian side of achievements in the cognitive domain (for example, by conducting aerial attacks at night and keeping them brief to make them difficult to film).⁴² Second, it increased the IDF's awareness of the importance of original footage from the field, leading to the training of military documentarists and their deployment within the armed forces. Third, it prompted a comprehensive transformation within the IDF Spokesperson's Unit, forcing it to develop methods for consistently sharing information with other government agencies.⁴³

Finally, 2005, brought about the establishment of the Centre of Cognitive Operations (CCO) responsible for the implementation of the required changes within the IDF. The first task of the newly established centre was a comprehensive

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³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Shmuel Nir, 'Teva ha'imut hamugbal' [The Nature of Limited Conflict], in Shaul Shai and Hagai Golan, (eds), *Haimut hamugbal* [The Limited Conflict], (Tel-Aviv: Ma'arachot, 2004), p. 19–44.

⁴¹ Saar Raveh, 'Sipur hakamat ha'malat' [The Story of the Establishment of the Centre for Consciousness Operations], (Ramat Hasharon: The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Centre (ITIC), March 2019).

⁴² Moshe Ya'alon, 'The Cognitive War as an Element of National Security: Based on Personal Experience', in Yossi Kuperwasser and David Siman-Tov, (eds), *The Cognitive Campaign: Strategic and Intelligence Perspectives*, (Tel-Aviv: INSS, The Institute for the Research of the Methodology of Intelligence (IRMI), 2019).

⁴³ Ibid.

undertaking aimed at developing the doctrinal-conceptual understanding of a cognitive campaign as a series of ‘cognitive operations’ intended to create a desired change in the perception of the reality, feelings, political position, and/or behaviour of a target audience.⁴⁴ A large part of the IDF’s terms, methods, and procedures still used today were developed by the CCO, such as: the process of defining and understanding target audiences; methods for influencing target audiences’ interests and positions; tools for measuring and evaluating the effectiveness of cognitive operations; and ways of integrating covert and overt activities.⁴⁵

While initially, the actions conducted by the CCO were limited and their character was reminiscent of the tactical psychological warfare conducted in the past,⁴⁶ a significant change occurred during the Second Lebanon War in 2006. Professor Yoram Peri, a leading communications expert in Israel, called this war ‘the first media war’.⁴⁷ On the one side, Hezbollah employed a strict communications management regime, including polished performances and the widespread use of its Al-Manar television channel. On the other side, the IDF ‘developed an obsession with everything relating to the cognition’ of both Israeli and Lebanese audiences.⁴⁸ For example, one of the reasons the town of Bint Jbeil was chosen for the IDF’s large-scale military operation was because Nasrallah had held his famous ‘Spider Web’ victory speech there after the Israelis had been forced to withdraw in 2000.⁴⁹ The IDF’s victory march across the town and the speech that followed by Colonel Hagai Mordechai, commander of the Paratroopers Brigade, were planned down to the finest detail as a coordinated cognitive operation. Soldiers were equipped with both photo and video cameras to document the hoisting of an Israeli flag over Hezbollah’s base in the town.⁵⁰

The IDF Spokesperson’s Unit, however, did not publish the material shot by the soldiers, claiming that the material was not professional enough. Moreover, it turned all its attention to the domestic rather than the foreign media, leaving international journalists no choice but to focus on the Lebanese interpretation

44 David Siman-Tov and David Sternberg, ‘The Missing Effort—Integrating the “Non-lethal” Dimension in the Israeli Military Lines of Operation’, *Cyber, Intelligence and Security*, Vol. 1, Issue 3, 2017, p. 65–81.

45 Raveh, ‘Sipur hakamat ha’malat’ [The Story of the Establishment of the Centre for Consciousness Operations].

46 Ibid.

47 Yoram Peri, *Milkhamot munkhot teksboret: paradox ha’utzma vebadilema ha’astrategit shel tzal* [Mediatized Wars: The Power Paradox and the IDF’s Strategic Dilemma], (Tel-Aviv: INSS, 2017), p. 43–48.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

of events, which suited Nasrallah's plans. Hence, despite awareness of the importance of that cognitive campaign, it was not conducted effectively. The Winograd Commission report on the Second Lebanon War, stated that:

The cognitive dimension is of the utmost importance in any war, and may be especially important in a conflict that does not have a decisive and unequivocal military victory. However, dealing effectively with this dimension requires us to be deeply aware of the components and processes of the enemy's thinking, whose consciousness we wish to 'sear'. We did not find any systematic discussions dealing with the basic assumptions of this complex and important topic.⁵¹

In other words, despite the CCO's attempt to revolutionise the field of cognitive operations, the implementation of the idea of cognitive campaign was not as successful as expected. The CCO's request to expand its operations to other areas was denied, and its capabilities and responsibilities were restricted.⁵² The attempt of the IDF Spokesperson's Unit to open the IDF to the media was seen as a principal failure, mainly from the perspective of information security. As a result, the IDF tightened its control over information flowing from the battlefield, almost completely eliminating the deployment of journalists, especially international ones, together with soldiers.⁵³

During the 2009 Operation Cast Lead in Gaza, in the absence of access to the IDF, foreign journalists were forced to rely on local sources from Gaza, many of whom operated under the threats or orders of Hamas. As a result, the international media was flooded with images of the horrors of war from the Palestinian side, while Israeli efforts to minimise the number of civilian casualties received no coverage. Moreover, due to domestic political demand to showcase a resolute response, the Israeli media published mostly images of IDF firepower, indirectly contributing to the message of the IDF's massive use of force.⁵⁴ This message made an even deeper imprint with the publication of the United Nations Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict—the Goldstone Report—in September 2009.

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51 *The Full Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Events of Military Engagement in Lebanon 2006* (Hebrew), The State of Israel, January 2008.

52 Raveh, 'Sipur hakamat ha'malat' [The Story of the Establishment of the Centre for Consciousness Operations].

53 Peri, *Milkehamot munkebot teleshoret* [Mediatized Wars], p. 48–52.

54 Ibid.

Both the Second Lebanon War and Operation Cast Lead showed that the IDF was aware of the importance of a cognitive campaign, but found it difficult to operate accordingly.

By the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, however, the idea of cognitive campaign was in fashion again due to several independent factors. The first was the development of the concept of ‘The Campaign between Wars’ in 2011.⁵⁵ This concept is based on an offensive, proactive, and persistent approach that holistically integrates all possible dimensions of warfare—kinetic, legal, cognitive, technological, electronic, cyber, military, and diplomatic.⁵⁶ Therefore, the idea of cognitive campaign was seen as an operational effort within the framework of ‘The Campaign between Wars’.

The second process was an effort to address the issue of delegitimisation that limited the IDF’s freedom of action in the wake of the Goldstone Report. To this end, an attempt was made by the IDF to synchronise activities with relevant institutions in Israel, such as the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Prime Minister’s Office.

In addition to these two internal processes, technological progress in the second part of the 2000s created favourable conditions for the comeback of the concept of cognitive campaign. The rise of digital platforms and social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, allowed broad and direct access to a wide audience, as well as the ability to communicate messages directly to targeted audiences. In 2009, the IDF Spokesperson’s Unit set up Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube accounts, and the Intelligence Corps devoted efforts to gathering information from these platforms.⁵⁷

These developments were reflected during the 2012 Operation Pillar of Defence in Gaza. This was the first operation that was accompanied by the IDF’s cognitive operations on social networks. The IDF Spokesperson’s Unit published videos of terrorists launching missiles from civilian areas in Gaza

55 Shay Shabtai, ‘T’fisat ha’m’a’arakha she’bein hamilkhamot’ [The Concept of the War Between Wars], *Ma’arachot*, N° 445, 2012, p. 24–27; Nizan Alon and Dana Preisler-Swery, “Ritzat hamaratot ve’tki’yat maklot be’galgalei oyev” hama’arakhot she’bein milkhamot shel tza”l [“Running a Marathon and Sticking Sticks in the Enemy’s Wheels” The Campaigns between the Wars of the IDF], *Bein Haktavim*, 22–23, 2019, p. 13–31.

56 *IDF Strategy* (Hebrew), Office of the Chief of Staff of the Israel Defence Forces, April 2018, (accessed 8 April 2020).

57 Ronen Menalis, ‘Ma’apekha hadigitalit shel tza’l’, [The Digital Revolution of the IDF], at conference *Digital Kenes itonut digitalit* [Digi—Conference of Digital Journalism], Interdisciplinary Centre Herzliya (IDC), 9 April 2018, (Video), (accessed 8 April 2020).

that fell in highly populated territories in Israel. It promoted reports exposing Hamas conducting executions of ‘collaborators’ and distributed messages regarding the IDF’s efforts to avoid civilian casualties in Gaza.⁵⁸ These reports and messages were released in large quantities and in a timely manner, including in several live broadcasts. In addition, civilians were called in to assist by sharing posts to increase their visibility on social platforms.⁵⁹ Immediately after the operation, the concept of cognitive campaign was back in favour and the IDF Spokesperson’s Unit re-established the Combat Documentary Unit intended to transmit professional photos directly from the field.⁶⁰

Several years later, the IDF Planning Division created a designated department responsible for cognitive operations targeting international audiences before, during, and after military operations against Hamas and Hezbollah.⁶¹ In 2018, the department was moved to the IDF Operations Directorate. Initially titled the Cognition Department, it was later renamed the Influence Department.⁶² The transfer of the Influence Department from the Planning Division (responsible for the development of force) to the Operations Directorate (responsible for its deployment) signalled the IDF’s desire to integrate the cognitive effort into its actual military operations.

The IDF General Staff formulated a doctrine for cognitive campaign and conducted several training exercises. However, despite this attempt to create a unified conceptual approach, different units within the IDF, other institutions of the Israeli Defence establishment, and other government institutions continued to interpret the idea of cognitive campaign differently.⁶³

The IDF Strategy published in April 2018 sought to provide a unified definition, calling to create:

The ability to influence and design cognition, including the development of tools for either wide or focused influence, and

58 Sasha Dratwa at conference *Pituakh ve’ney media takhat esh* [Development and New Media Under Fire], The Israeli Internet Association (ISOC-IL), 15 February 2013, (Video), (accessed 8 April 2020).

59 Peri, *Milkhomat minkhot tekboret* [Mediatized Wars], p. 57–62.

60 Shai Gal, *‘Yehidar hatiud hamivtzi’* [The Combat Documentation Unit], *Channel 2 News*, 26 June 2015, (Video), (accessed: 8 April 2020).

61 Amos Harel, “‘Mahleket toda’a’: rzel hikim guf she’ifa’al mul medinot zarot le’hashpa’a al de’at haka’al” [“Department of Cognition”: The IDF Established a Unit that will Act against Foreign States to Influence Public Opinion], *Haaretz*, 4 December 2018, (accessed: 8 April 2020).

62 Ibid.

63 Gabi Siboni and Gal Perl Finkel, ‘The IDF’s Cognitive Effort: Supplementing the Kinetic Effort’, *INSIS Insight*, N° 1028, 1 March 2018.

the integration of the cognitive effort as an independent effort that accompanies and complements other various efforts.⁶⁴

The changes suggested by the IDF Strategy had immediate impact on the IDF Spokesperson's Unit, which had been leading overt cognitive operations in the IDF. When Brigadier General (Res.) Ronen Manelis, the former IDF spokesperson, was asked about the difference between himself and previous IDF spokespersons, he replied:

I brought an understanding that information, and the way it is used, have an influence on the enemy's consciousness [...] cognitive operations have the ability to influence the battlefield and how it is perceived by the enemy [...] I used the IDF's digital platforms to create legitimization for its operations and to delegitimise and hurt the enemy.⁶⁵

In the past, the role of the IDF Spokesperson's Unit was to communicate with the Israeli public and with foreign journalists based in Israel. The idea that the Unit should also influence the enemy—even if only in the overt spectrum of cognitive operations—indicated a significant shift in IDF thinking.⁶⁶

This transition from the concept of *hasbara* to the framework of cognitive campaign has not been limited to the IDF. Cooperation between different security agencies and governmental institutions created collaboration that has led to a systemic change in Israel's approach towards information and how it can be used.

The first government office to integrate the concept of cognitive campaign outside the IDF was the Ministry of Strategic Affairs. After the 2010 Gaza Flotilla incident, the ministry was tasked with addressing international delegitimation as a major strategic challenge to Israel. The decision was made following the understanding that there is an ongoing coordinated campaign to delegitimise the State of Israel in the eyes of the international community. According to the Ministry:

64 *IDF Strategy*, Office of the Chief of Staff of the Israel Defence Forces.

65 Ronen Manelis in 'Conversation between Noam Manella and IDF Spokesman Brigadier General Ronen Manelis', INSS, 29 January 2019, (Video), (accessed 8 April 2020).

66 'Ha'ium hakharig shel dover tzal be'aravit—al sar hatayarut shel Ievanon' [The Unusual Threat by the IDF Arabic Language Spokesman against Lebanon's Minister of Tourism], *Channel 12 News*, 28 August 2019, (accessed 8 April 2020); Nir Dvori, 'Dover tzal be'aravit mitgare be'haniya: "haya shave lirot le'ever Israel?' [The IDF Arabic Language Spokesman Teases Ismail Haniyeh: "Was it Worth Shooting at Israel?], *Channel 12 News*, 26 March 2019, (accessed 8 April 2020).

This campaign includes operations against Israel in the fields of economics, academia, culture, and in the field of cognitive perception of Israel's legitimacy as a national homeland for the Jewish people. The Ministry operates as the leading government institution for all other ministries and relevant government institutions, and maintains relations with other organisations fighting for Israel in this campaign.⁶⁷

In March 2016, the Ministry developed a concept titled 'Perception Shapes Reality' intended to fight the delegitimisation. Accordingly, the Ministry acknowledged that Israel sometimes conducts operations in the Territories that are difficult to explain to international audiences unfamiliar with the context. Hence, different groups and organisations hostile to Israel disseminate partial, biased, or even fabricated information about these events, using concepts and associations familiar to the targeted audiences to shape their reality in a way that delegitimises Israel. Consequently, the Ministry decided to address the problem by shifting the centre of gravity of this struggle from the physical space of college and university campuses (the comfort zone of anti-Israel actors) to the virtual space of information (the comfort zone of Israel where it can maximise its cyber and intelligence capabilities).⁶⁸

In the Ministry's view, the tools of public diplomacy and *hashbara* are insufficient on their own, and there is a need to combine them with offensive intelligence tools able to seed doubt regarding information distributed by anti-Israel actors, and to divide their organisations and force them to cease their operations. Thus, in the short term, the operations conducted by the Ministry are intended to undermine trust in the content distributed by these actors. In the long term, they aim to undermine their whole institutional infrastructure.⁶⁹

This combination of public diplomacy and intelligence tools is one of the foundations of the Ministry's operations. According to its former Director-General Sima Vaknin-Gil 'We brought in a military concept [...] the concept of

67 The Ministry of Strategic Affairs and Public Diplomacy, Prime Minister's Office, (accessed 8 April 2020).

68 Tal Shalev, 'Da'aga be'yerushalaim: hanotzrim ha'evangelistim be'hartzot habrit mitrakhekim n'i'srael' [Jerusalem is Worried: Evangelical Christians Distance Themselves from Israel], *WallaNews*, 7 August 2016, (accessed 8 April 2020).

69 Sima Vaknin-Gil, 'Hakrav al hatoda'a vemilkhama ha'atid' [The Battle for Perception and Future Wars], at conference *Kenes Meir Dagan lehitakhon ve'astrategiya* [The Meir Dagan Security and Strategy Conference], Netanya Academic College, 21 March 2017, (Video), (accessed 8 April 2020).

the cognitive campaign.⁷⁰ Moreover, the Israeli government decided that the Freedom of Information Act would not apply to the Ministry, because:

[It] operates under four complementary ways of action: warning, deterrence, offense, explanation. Each one is translated into required objectives, sub-efforts, mechanisms and tools. The successful management of the campaign requires that all its elements would be kept under maximum ambiguity.⁷¹

It is noteworthy that the ministry also works with civilian organisations as contractors, both to maintain ambiguity and to compensate for the Ministry's lack of capacity.⁷²

The transition from the concept of *hasbara* to the concept of the cognitive campaign was also reflected in a political move led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whose main aim was to use intelligence as an information weapon. This usage is defined as 'coercive disclosure'—when Israel exposes classified intelligence about its adversaries in order to simultaneously achieve diplomatic and military goals.⁷³ One of the most notable examples took place in 2018, when Netanyahu exposed, via live broadcast and in front of dozens of journalists, the Iranian nuclear archive, including materials obtained through a wide-scale intelligence operation. His performance was polished for over two months in an attempt to perfect the presentation in a way that would simultaneously produce different impacts on different targeted audiences.⁷⁴

70 Sima Vaknin-Gil, 'Etgarim lebitakhon leumi' [Challenges to National Security], at conference *Bitakhon leumi, faik: news ve'hakerav al batoda'a be'idan badigitali* [National Security, Fake News, and the Battle for Perception in the Digital Age], Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), 11 November 2019, (Video), (accessed 8 April 2020).

71 The State of Israel, *Law Memorandum: Freedom of Information Law (Amendment No. 16) (Exception of the Ministry of Strategic Affairs and Hasbara in regards to its activities within the responsibility given to it by the Government to lead the campaign against the delegitimisation and boycotting of Israel)*, 2017, reference: 803-99-2017-025616.

72 Colonel D and Major J, 'Toda'a be'am' – irgunim meshutafim ezrahiim-tzva'im' ['Cognition Ltd.' – Joint Military-Civil Organizations], in Yossi Kuperwasser and David Siman-Tov, (eds), *Hama'araha al batoda'a: hebetim bastrategiim vemodeniim* [The Cognitive Campaign: Strategic and Intelligence Perspectives], (Tel-Aviv: INSS, IRMI, 2019).

73 Ofek Riemer and Daniel Sobelman, 'Coercive Disclosure: Israel's Weaponization of Intelligence', *War on the Rocks*, 30 August 2019, (accessed: 8 April 2020).

74 Yarden Vatikai and Colonel O, 'When the Intelligence Officer and the Public Diplomat Meet', in Yossi Kuperwasser and David Siman-Tov, (eds), *The Cognitive Campaign: Strategic and Intelligence Perspectives*, (Tel-Aviv: INSS, IRMI, 2019).

Part Three: Public Diplomacy

While the concept of public diplomacy has a very long history,⁷⁵ different organisations in Israel interpret the concept differently. On the one hand, there are those who define public diplomacy as an aggregation of actions that promote the political interests of a state through developing mutual understanding by the dissemination of information intended to influence audiences abroad.⁷⁶ Equally, there are those who see it as a supplementary effort that assists the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in achieving its goals by seeking the support of carefully selected audiences.⁷⁷

The use of the term 'public diplomacy' in Israel began in the mid-2000s, when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs introduced it as a replacement for the outdated *hasbara*. According to the Ministry, 'New Public Diplomacy' entails the 'promotion of a nexus of interests of one country in another country, by creating an attractive image of the former based on a dialogue with the public of the latter, through the use of culture, mutual aid, exchange of delegations and other relevant activities'.⁷⁸

This shift from *hasbara* to public diplomacy was based on the understanding of the changes that technology brought to the information environment, facilitating simultaneous multi-channel communication with different target audiences. In 2008, an internal document circulated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasised that the basic assumptions regarding the process of persuasion had changed, creating difficulties in transmitting a unified message and exercising control over it.⁷⁹ While *hasbara* had goals that were usually short term and *post factum*, the new public diplomacy was required to achieve long-term, multi-dimensional goals, addressing a variety of political aspects by facilitating a transition from the one-sided communication of persuasion to a dialogue.⁸⁰

This change is reflected in the remarks made by Ron Prosor, former Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In 2006, he claimed that the

75 Nicholas Cull, 'Public Diplomacy before Gullion', in Nancy Snow and Nicolas Cull (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, (New York: Routledge, 2020).

76 *Diplomatya Tziburit be'Israel* [The Public Diplomacy of Israel], Samuel Neaman Institute, Technion University, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Israel, 2009.

77 *Israeli Hasbara: Myths and Facts: A Report on the Israeli Hasbara Apparatus 2012*, (Jerusalem: Molad – The Centre for the Renewal of Israeli Democracy, 2012).

78 *Public Diplomacy in a World of Rapid Change—Assessing the Political-Security Situation*, (Hebrew), Internal Document of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Israel, 2008, (Classified).

79 Ibid.

80 Ibid.

Ministry was changing its strategy from a defensive explanation-based one to a strategy aimed at advancing Israel's soft power.⁸¹ Remarks made by Tzipi Livni, the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the same period, indicate the reasons behind the replacement of *hasbara* with public diplomacy:

In my view, I live in a state that has its values. [It is] a developed state with a stable economy, part of the free world [and is] a democratic country. On the other hand, when we look at the pictures that are supposedly coming out of here, the reflected image looks like it was taken from some sort of distorted lens. There are two options. The first is to continue saying that the entire world is against us ... The second option is to make a change. This is not some kind of instant spin, it's a long and arduous process.⁸²

This change occurred due to three main developments. The first was the increasing criticism of the term *hasbara* that reflected an apologetic and self-righteous position. Moreover, the usage of the Hebrew term attracted too much international criticism, as a type of propaganda specifically designed and exclusively deployed by Israel. Its replacement with public diplomacy, which is a standard term commonly used around the world, meant they could address this criticism.

The second development was the increasing understanding that it is simply impossible to justify and explain every action. Public diplomacy, unlike *hasbara*, offered a broader set of communications methods.

Finally, there was an increasing understanding that the socio-political and technological changes of the late 20th century had changed the ways of diplomacy. *Hasbara*, conducted exclusively by the state, was replaced by public diplomacy, which enabled the mobilisation of civilian entities and public opinion leaders who did not have a clearly defined affiliation with Israel.⁸³

81 Ron Prosor, 'Hadiplomatiya haisraelit be'ulam meshtane: mimegnana le'yozma' [Israeli Diplomacy in the Changing World: From Defence to Initiative], at Herzliya Conference, 22 January 2006, (accessed 8 April 2020).

82 Tzipi Livni quoted in *Public Diplomacy in a World of Rapid Change*.

83 Haim Waxman and Daniel Cohen, 'Beyond the Web: Diplomacy, Cognition, and Influence', in Yossi Kupevasser and David Siman-Tov, (eds), *The Cognitive Campaign: Strategic and Intelligence Perspectives*, (Tel-Aviv: INSS, IRMI, 2019), p. 51–60.

In 2012, following the adaptation of the new conceptual framework, the Division for Hasbara in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was renamed the Division of Public Policy.⁸⁴ With the new name came also new responsibilities. While the previous goal of the Division had been to explain and justify the policy of Israel to the international community, its new goal was to present the Israeli narrative in all its diversity.⁸⁵ As part of this transformation, a Department of Digital Diplomacy was established within the Division of Public Policy to promote the Israeli narrative on various digital media platforms in a number of different languages (Hebrew, English, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, and Persian), leveraging digital tools to influence diverse audiences.⁸⁶ According to Noam Katz, Head of the Division of Public Policy, the shift towards public diplomacy signified an adaptation of a more balanced approach to diplomatic affairs, integrating military-political and social issues.⁸⁷

Interestingly enough, following this transformation within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the IDF decided that it also needed to be involved in the field of public diplomacy, regardless of the fact that it is considered the preserve of civilians. Following the IDF's interpretation of public diplomacy, the IDF Spokesperson's Unit began to initiate different activities intended to present 'different' depictions of the IDF, exposing international audiences to IDF daily life—sports, cultural activities, and education.⁸⁸

While Israel's understanding of public diplomacy is rooted in the concept of *hasbara*, it has introduced an evolutionary change in the context of *hasbara's* past failures and of the new digital age that transformed information communication technologies in the last 20 years. The main changes from *hasbara* to public Diplomacy can be summarised as follows:⁸⁹

1. From an approach that tries to explain and justify Israel's policies by targeting domestic and international audiences, to an approach that aims to establish a multilevel dialogue with target audiences at home, abroad, and in the adversary's camp.

84 Interview with Yiftah Coriel, Director of the Department of Digital Diplomacy at the Division of Public Policy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Israel, conducted by the authors on 9 March 2020.

85 *The Division of Public Policy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Israel*, (Hebrew), (accessed 8 April 2020).

86 Interview with Yiftah Coriel.

87 Interview with Noam Katz, The Division of Public Policy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Israel, conducted by the authors on 5 April 2020.

88 Israel Tal-Saranga, 'Diplomatiya Tziburit Tzvait' [Military Public Diplomacy], *Ma'arachot*, N° 446, 2012, p. 11–19. See also Clila Magen and Ephraim Lapid, 'Israel's Military Public Diplomacy Evolution: Historical and Conceptual Dimensions', *Public Relations Review*, Issue 44, 2018, p. 287–98.

89 *Public Diplomacy in a World of Rapid Change*.

2. From an approach that tries to secure legitimisation of Israel's actions, to an approach that aims to elevate Israel's achievements not only in the field of policy, but also in culture, economics, and technology.
3. From activities conducted exclusively by the state, to the integration and mobilisation of civil organisations.
4. From an approach that targets decision-makers, to an approach that targets various audiences—decision-makers, civilian influencers, and the general public.
5. From an approach based on formal monologue, to an approach that integrates formal monologue with informal dialogue.

Conclusion: Israel's SC—A Rose by Any Other Name?

When the Israeli government appointed in 1968 the freshly retired Lieutenant General Yitzhak Rabin as Israel's ambassador to the United States, Rabin asked: 'What does the government expect Israel's Ambassador to the United States to achieve?' He was then told: 'Diplomatic Objectives? We have no idea.'⁹⁰ This anecdote provides an insight into the Israeli approach to its communications with the rest of the world, suggesting that either Israel's communication aims have been so definitive that they are obvious, or its communications have been in such disarray that no one exactly understands their aims. The analysis of three different Israeli approaches to communications, presented in this paper, reveals that the latter is probably closer to the truth.

To understand why and how Israel has found itself operating according to three different concepts simultaneously, it is important to place the stories of *hasbara*, cognitive campaign, and public diplomacy into the Israeli cultural context. While analysing the full scope of Israeli political culture is beyond the remit of this paper, three points relevant to the way Israel conducts its communications deserve attention.

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⁹⁰ Sasson Sofer, 'Towards Distant Frontiers: The Course of Israeli Diplomacy', *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 10, N° 1–2, 2004, p. 1.

Legitimacy

The first is the question of legitimacy. From its very establishment, Israel has had to address not only the legitimacy of its military activities, but also its legitimacy as a Jewish state.⁹¹ In the Israeli mind, these two different types of legitimacy are interconnected. According to many Israeli scholars and politicians ‘after more than 60 years of the independence of the State of Israel, there are still many question marks regarding its sovereignty and its right to be an equal member of the international community’.⁹²

This article shows that Israel’s approach to addressing this issue has changed over time. From the approach of disregarding information activities on the supposition that actions should speak for themselves, to the naïve approach of *hasbara*, which assumed that all of Israel’s actions could be explained to and accepted by the international community. From an attempt to borrow military practices and civilianise cognitive campaign, to an Israelification of public diplomacy in an attempt to contextualise Israel’s activities within internationally accepted practices. On the one hand, Israel has faced delegitimisation campaigns throughout its history on an unprecedented scale. On the other hand, Israel is not and has never been as isolated as it perceives itself.⁹³ According to many Israeli scholars, a defining characteristic of Israel’s political behaviour is existential anxiety.⁹⁴ The inherent assumption that ‘all the world is against us’⁹⁵ explains Israel’s inability to separate international criticism of its policies from attempts to delegitimise Israel as an accepted member of the international community. It also explains Israel’s recurring failure to create a coherent approach to its communications—while Israel addresses the legitimacy of its military activities and the legitimacy of its statehood as an interconnected whole, it has consistently failed to understand that international audiences perceive them as two separate issues.

91 Aaron Klieman, *Israel & the World after 40 Years*, (McLean, VA: Pergamon-Brassey’s International Defense Publishers, 1990).

92 Dov Ben-Meir, *Mediniyut Hutz* [Foreign Policy] (Tel-Aviv: Yedioth Ahronoth and Chemed Books, 2011), p. 25.

93 Efraim Inbar, *Israel ein merudedet* [Israel Is not Isolated] (Tel-Aviv: Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 2013).

94 For example: Yair Gad and Sharona Odom-Weiss, ‘Israeli Diplomacy: The Effects of Cultural Trauma’, *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, N° 9, 2014, p. 1–23; Yair Gad, *Tzofen ha’isarelynut: aseret ha’dibrot shel’ shmot be’al’paim* [The Code of Israeliness: The Ten Commandments for the 21st century], (Jerusalem: Keter Books, 2011).

95 Yair Gad, ‘Israeli Existential Anxiety: Cultural Trauma and the Constitution of National Character’, *Social Identities: Journal of the Study of Race, Nation and Culture*, Vol. 20, No. 4–5, 2014, p. 355.

Militarised communications

The second important point is the role that the IDF plays in political decision making. According to many Israeli experts, the IDF has historically constituted ‘the dominant influence over policy-making and policy execution’.⁹⁶ This article shows that the IDF has been exercising its influence not only on the political decision-making process, but also on how that process is communicated to the rest of the world. This influence *has* two main aspects. The first is that the majority of Israel’s communication activities have traditionally addressed the work of the IDF and other security related issues. Therefore, the IDF has naturally found itself in the position of shaping Israel’s communications approach.

Second, this experience has forced the IDF to develop one of the most sophisticated military communications apparatus in the world, capable of simultaneously targeting a range of different audiences. However, the over-militarisation of Israel’s communications has its price. As this article shows, the IDF’s inability to read political competitions between decision-makers and inter-ministerial rivalries within the civil service has consistently prevented the development of a coherent and systematic approach to communications in Israel. Paraphrasing Georges Clemenceau, Israel has been constantly failing to understand that—*state’s communications is too serious a matter to leave to soldiers*.

Creative improvisation without comprehensive theory

This leads to the third point—the Israeli culture of *iltur* [creative improvisation].⁹⁷ Traditionally, the IDF’s culture cultivated doers, rather than thinkers. The lack of intellectual vigour, however, has always been compensated by the Israeli cultural emphasis on improvisation, where officers’ ability ‘to orient, to think, and to bounce ideas quickly,’ finding a better, ‘not-by-the-book’ solution, is considered a hallmark of military performance.⁹⁸ This cultivation of improvisation in the IDF has often been connected to the IDF’s culture of ‘anti-intellectualism’, or

96 Stuart Cohen, ‘Changing Civil—Military Relations in Israel: Towards an Over-subordinate IDF?’, *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 12, N° 4, 2006, p. 769; see also: Yehudah Ben-Meir, *Civil-Military Relations in Israel*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); Eva Etzioni-Halevy, ‘Civil-Military Relations and Democracy: The Case of the Military-Political Elites’ Connection in Israel’, *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 22, 1996, p. 401–417.

97 See Dima Adamsky, *The Culture of Military Innovation: The Impact of Cultural Factors on the Revolution in Military Affairs in Russia, the US and Israel* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), Chapter 4.

98 Adamsky, *The Culture of Military Innovation*, p. 117–19.

even 'false intellectualism'.⁹⁹ A recent criticism from the Winograd Commission of inquiry into the events of the Second Lebanon War highlighted 'the connection between cultural organisation of improvisation and the lack of professionalism at the level of soldiers, as well as commanders'.¹⁰⁰ That said, creative improvisation has frequently compensated for anti-intellectualism and a deficit of professionalism, as 'improvisers' are also 'problem solvers' and, as the military is constantly busy with fighting, there is never time to 'sit and study'.¹⁰¹

This emphasis on improvisation at the expense of systematic thinking is not limited to the IDF.¹⁰² Israel has traditionally avoided developing comprehensive conceptual frameworks, fearing they might limit its ability to improvise the best solution. Israel's first Security Doctrine, written by the first Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, was also its last. Since then, the Israeli Cabinet has acted according to 'de facto doctrine based on meetings and assessments with the security establishment or without it'.¹⁰³ In the absence of a systematic approach to security, it is not surprising that Israel has never developed a comprehensive conceptual framework for its communications. Instead it has consistently improvised conceptual transformations to address immediate communications needs, introducing new procedures, departments, and forums, only to abandon them when the need recedes and reinvent them a few years later when communications fail again. As Moshe Ya'alon, former Chief of Staff of the IDF, stated:

Despite the increasing recognition in the State of Israel of the importance of the cognitive campaign, the steps taken so far display a lack of consistency and systematic activity, and they range between improvisation stemming from necessity and ad hoc planning of individual cases.¹⁰⁴

99 See Avi Kober, 'The Rise and Fall of Israeli Operational Art, 1948–2008,' in John Olsen and Martin Creveld Van (eds), *The Evolution of Operational Art: From Napoleon to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Avi Kober, 'What Happened to Israeli Military Thought?', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 34, N° 5, 2011, p. 707–32.

100 The State of Israel, *The Full Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Events of Military Engagement in Lebanon 2006* (Hebrew), January 2008, p. 425.

101 Amihud Shachar, 'Ha'baya aina be'tzal' [The Problem is not in the IDF], *Ma'arachot*, N° 380–381, 2001, p. 88–89.

102 Gad, *Tzofen ba'isareliyut* [The Code of Israeliness].

103 Moshe Ya'alon, 'Ptah Davar' [Foreword], in Meir Elran, Gabi Siboni and Kobi Michael, (eds), *'Astrategiyat Tzal' b'rei habitabon balenmi* [The IDF Strategy' in the Perspective of National Security], (Tel Aviv: INSS, 2016), p. 7.

104 Ya'alon, 'The Cognitive War as an Element of National Security', p. 21–22.

These three characteristics of the Israeli cultural context explain why Israel has been jumping through various conceptual hoops in an attempt to communicate its messages to the world. There is a traceable decline of *hasbara* as the driving communication concept in Israel, with cognitive campaign and public diplomacy taking the lead in the IDF and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs respectively. However, there is a difference between strategic behaviour, which suggests a comprehensive conceptual framework and plan, and acting strategically, which suggests a flexible and improvised response to every event in an attempt to maximise possible results.¹⁰⁵ Israel's approach to communications is of the latter sort. In other words, Israel does not conduct *strategic communications*, which requires strategic behaviour in order to create 'a holistic approach to communication'.¹⁰⁶ Instead, it *communicates strategically*, employing various institutions and different approaches in an attempt to find the best possible response to every challenge it faces. The title of this article asks whether Israel's approach to communication is *de facto* SC (a rose by any other name). Unfortunately, neither *hasbara*, nor cognitive campaign, nor public diplomacy answers the requirements of this rose (SC). Instead of a universal rose, Israel has a bouquet of different flowers, each of which is grown by a different institution, fitting for only a limited number of occasions and directed to separate and specific audiences.

This conclusion leads to two important insights. The first addresses the main theoretical question of this article about the consequences of the absence of an exhaustive conceptual framework to conduct SC. By analysing the case of Israel, this paper shows that without such a theoretical framework and one institution responsible for coordinating the words, images, and actions produced by all relevant actors with the intention of influencing targeted audiences in pursuit of national interests, any attempt at SC is destined to run into difficulties. The inherent competition between different institutions produces too much friction and disarray, amplified by differences in approaches based on different ways, means, and methods.

The second insight is about the general direction of Israel's approach to communications. In the last decade, Israel has developed, for the first time, a systematic conceptual framework for its security-military activities short of war—"The Campaign between Wars".¹⁰⁷ The revival of the concept of cognitive

105 Lawrence Freedman, *Ukraine and the Art of Strategy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

106 Bolt and Haiden, *Improving NATO Strategic Communications Terminology*, p. 46.

107 Shabtai, 'T'fisat ha'ma'arakha she'bein hamilkhamot' [The Concept of the War Between Wars].

campaign within this framework offers an interesting insight into the future of Israel's communications. Both concepts have been developed and promoted by figures connected to the IDF Intelligence Corps¹⁰⁸ as 'the IDF's approach to prevention and influence'¹⁰⁹ based on 'accurate intelligence that enables precise operational action'.¹¹⁰ The IDF Intelligence Corps, due to the very nature of intelligence gathering and analysis, is an oasis of systematic conceptual thinking in the IDF's desert of improvising 'doers'. Therefore, the concept of cognitive campaign seems to be the best candidate to grow and become the 'rose' of strategic communications in Israel. The IDF has the requisite influence in the corridors of power to promote its conceptual thinking. The Ministry of Strategic Affairs already operates within the framework of cognitive campaign. However, only time will tell whether Israel will be able to elevate the concept of cognitive campaign out of its military niche, turning it into 'a holistic approach to communication based on values and interests'¹¹¹ that encompasses everything Israel does to achieve its objectives.

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108 Including the last IDF Spokesperson Brigadier General (Res.) Ronen Manelis. See Gili Kohen and Amos Harel, 'Dover Tzal Haba: Ozro ak Ha'ramatkal Izenkot, Aluf Mishne Ronen Manelis' [The Next IDF Spokesperson: The Assistant of the Chief of General Staff Eizenkot, Col. Ronen Manelis], *Ha'aretz*, 07 February 2017, (accessed 9 April 2020). For the role of the IDF Intelligence Corps in the development of the concept of 'The Campaign between the Wars' see Galili, 'Ha'Ma'araha she'bein milkhamot ve'ha'ma'amatz ha'ne'elam' [The Campaign between the Wars and the Invisible Effort]; Yosi Melamed and Dan Raviv, *Milhamot ha'tz'lam, hamosad ikehilat hamodi'in* [The Shadow Wars, the Mossad, and the Intelligence Community], (Tel-Aviv: Yadiot Hasfarim, 2012).

109 Alon and Preisler-Swery, '“Ritzat hamaraton ve'tki'yat maklot be'galgalei oyev” hama'arakhot she'bein milkhamot shel tza't' ["Running a Marathon and Sticking Sticks in the Enemy's Wheels The Campaigns between the Wars of the IDF"]', p. 14.

110 Galili, 'Ha'Ma'araha she'bein milkhamot ve'ha'ma'amatz ha'ne'elam' [The Campaign between the Wars and the Invisible Effort], p. 81.

111 Bolt and Haiden, *Improving NATO Strategic Communications Terminology*, p. 46.

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SHAPING AN ANTARCTIC IDENTITY IN ARGENTINA AND CHILE

Ignacio Javier Cardone

Abstract

Since the end of the 19th century, both Argentina and Chile have woven Antarctica—the white continent—into the conception of their national territories and identities, establishing a tradition that continues today. To understand the process through which these identities have been constructed, this article examines the strategic communications of the countries involved in the dispute over territories south of 60° south latitude. Early negotiations were incidental and reactive, but as the situation evolved internationally the two South American countries became entangled in their strategies to incorporate portions of Antarctica into their national territories, employing diplomatic interchange, symbolic actions, and the projection of an Antarctic identity by means of public discourse, educational curriculum, and maps. Furthermore, they promoted the idea of an ‘American Antarctica’ as a way of linking Antarctica with the South American continent in an effort to obtain international recognition for their territorial claims. Both countries were successful in instilling a domestic ‘national Antarctic consciousness’, but failed to gather international support. Although their strategic communications regarding Antarctica were successful in terms of the original objective of integrating the idea into their respective national identities, resorting to territoriality seems to have limited their ability to adapt to new conditions, such as those established by the Antarctic Treaty in 1959.

Keywords—*strategic communication, strategic communications, Antarctica, Argentina, Chile, territorial claims*

About the Author

Ignacio J. Cardone holds a PhD in International Relations from the University of São Paulo and King's College London. Post-doctoral researcher at the International Relations Research Centre of the University of São Paulo. His research interests focus on: Antarctic history and politics, science diplomacy, climate change and international relations, and political theory.

Introduction

Geography is anything but neutral. The way in which a territory is presented, represented, and experienced has practical effects in social reality.¹ Territoriality, defined as the delimitation of and control over a geographical area, is a constitutive element of the modern nation-state. To assert its sovereignty, a state must define its 'borders'—the edges of the territory it claims for itself.² The extent of a nation's territory determines the benefits that could be expected to accrue to the nation through control over that territory, such as a place for its population to settle, the availability of natural resources, and the demarcation of defence lines in the face of external threats. The extent of a state's territory is linked to its identity in the eyes of the world. The constitution of a state's territoriality, both domestically and internationally, is essential to its core functions. Thus, territoriality and all communication regarding territoriality are of strategic importance.

Strategic communications is understood here as a practice involving the use of words, images, symbols, or actions (both by their presence and their absence)

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1 A contemporary discussion about the scope of the social and political implications of cartography could be found in: Barbara Belyea, 'Images of Power: Derrida/Foucault/Harley', *Cartographica: The International Journal for Geographic Information and Geovisualization*, 29.2 (1992), 1–9; Jeremy W. Crampton, 'Maps as Social Constructions: Power, Communication and Visualization', *Progress in Human Geography*, 25.2 (2001), 235–52; J. B. Harley, 'Cartography, Ethics and Social Theory', *Cartographica: The International Journal for Geographic Information and Geovisualization*, 27.2 (1990), 1–23; 'Deconstructing the Map', *Cartographica: The International Journal for Geographic Information and Geovisualization*, 26.2 (1989), 1–20; 'Historical Geography and the Cartographic Illusion', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 1989, xv; and 'Silences and Secrecy: The Hidden Agenda of Cartography in Early Modern Europe', *Imago Mundi*, 40.1 (1988), 57–76.

2 Robert D. Sack, 'Human Territoriality: A Theory', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 73.1 (1983), 55; and Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence: Volume Two of a Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), 49–53.

to influence the attitudes and behaviour of a defined social group in pursuing interests or objectives considered to be strategic.³ What distinguishes strategic communications from other, non-strategic communications is that they have lasting political consequences both domestically and internationally. Thus, the strategic character of a communication is defined both by its calculated relevant objectives as well as by its intended lasting effects.

As Agnew writes, the spatiality imbued in a nation-state's 'territoriality' is an historically determined feature that coexists with other forms of spatiality.⁴ However, this 'territoriality' is also a characteristic of the formation of the nation-state as a political entity and underlies its expansion as the dominant form of political organisation around the globe.⁵ The case I present here is the policy of two South American countries, Argentina and Chile, to link their identities with Antarctica. This case exemplifies the strategic nature of communication practices and their use as one of a state's main resources for identity building.

By integrating a sector of the Antarctic continent into all official maps of Argentina and Chile, those governments not only seek to inform domestic and international populations about the geographical features of Antarctica, but also intend to make a political statement about how they see the white continent in territorial terms.⁶ As we will see in this paper, this approach is not new. Nor does it emanate from an isolated or sporadic attempt to project territorial ambitions onto Antarctica. Rather it results from a long historical tradition based on the symbolic and communicative aspects of political strategy.

The relevance of Antarctica to the strategic concerns of both Argentina and Chile does not stem from some form of stubbornness but is the outcome of successful strategic communications campaigns establishing an awareness of Antarctica as part of their national identities. While this strategy has been successful in promoting an internal consensus around the importance of

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3 Neville Bolt, 'Foreword', *Defence Strategic Communications*, 6 (Riga: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 2019), p. 6; and James P. Farwell, *Persuasion and Power: The Art of Strategic Communication* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2012), xix.

4 John A. Agnew, 'The Territorial Trap: The Geographical Assumptions of International Relations Theory', *Review of International Political Economy*, 1.1 (1994), 53–80.

5 This understanding of strategic communications emphasises the capability of the communicative aspect to shape some intended social conditions, that is, the medium through which an organisational agent can put forward his reflective monitoring of such conditions. That is not to deny the multi-layered and multi-directional character of all communicative practice, but to focus on the agent for which the communicative action holds a strategic significance. I am following here Giddens's theory of structuration: Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (Polity, 1984).

6 Examples can be found in: [Argentina's 'bicontinental' map](#) and [Chile's 'tricontinental' map](#).

Antarctica to Argentine and Chilean national interests, it has been less successful in gathering the support of other Latin American countries and obtaining global acceptance.⁷ The objective of the pages that follow is to show how the territoriality of Antarctica was constituted in the public consciousness in Argentina and Chile before the signing of the Antarctic Treaty in 1959. This history enables us to understand better the current attitudes of both countries in the face of diverse questions regarding Antarctica, while also illuminating how strategic communications were employed at the time.

This article is organised in six parts. Part One describes the development of early Argentine and Chilean relations with the white continent and how these were presented. Part Two describes their moving from relatively cautious involvement with the Antarctic regions in the mid-1920s to their assumption of a more assertive role at the dawn of the Second World War. Part Three emphasises the development of the concept of an American Antarctica and its intended and unintended consequences, particularly in the context of the Cold War. Part Four analyses Argentina and Chile's increased involvement in Antarctica and their use of a nationalist discourse in the face of a rising conflict with the UK over the Antarctic Peninsula. Part Five reflects on changes introduced into the international situation in Antarctica by the International Geophysical Year project in 1957–58 and the signing of the Antarctic Treaty in 1959, and the reactions these events elicited in Argentina and Chile. The Sixth and final part presents our conclusions, including theoretical reflections arising from these case studies.

1. Early South American involvement in Antarctica

The territorial constitutions of Argentina and Chile are intrinsically linked with the history of their colonisation, independence, decolonisation, and regional disputes.⁸ Having inherited the legal and cultural framework of the Spanish metropolis, many of the territorial disputes between Latin American countries

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⁷ Furthermore, the suspension of the territorial question with the signing of the Antarctic Treaty on 1st December 1959 and the evolution of the Antarctic regime, rendered the objectives of such a strategy outdated. Nonetheless, the strategy of communications around Antarctica continued largely unaltered. For example, the Argentine Law 26.651, dated 20 October 2010, established the obligation to use the 'bicontinental map' which replaced the previous map in which the Antarctic sector was represented on a smaller scale. The initiative was justified by the *Instituto Geográfico Nacional* on the following basis: 'The initiative arose due to the fact that the regular maps minimized the extension of our country, undermining our identity and our legitimate rights over Antarctic territories.' (Retrieved 29 July 2019 from: <http://www.ign.gob.ar/node/51>, own translation).

⁸ A brief chronology of Latin-American territorial conflicts can be found in: Juan García Pérez, 'Conflictos Territoriales y Luchas Fronterizas En América Latina Durante Los Siglos XIX y XX.', *Norba. Revista de Historia*, 18 (2005), 215–41.



Figure 1. General Map of the Antarctic Region South of the American Continent.

during the 19th century adopted the logic of power politics, mirroring what was happening in Europe.⁹ Much of how the former Spanish colonies saw and interpreted their territory was framed by several centuries of Spanish colonialism and domination, including a history of ill-defined colonial frontiers. Legalist and traditionalist approaches to colonial rights derived from their Hispanic heritage were mixed with ambitions to expand their influence, power, and prestige. This characterised the attitude with which countries such as Argentina and Chile interpreted their territorial rights and disputes at the time, including their maritime projection.

⁹ Robert N. Burr, *By Reason Or Force: Chile and the Balancing of Power in South America, 1830-1905* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1974).

The development of seal hunting in Antarctica in the first half of the 1800s took place at a time when neither country had achieved complete control of its territories and both were involved in civil wars and border disputes.¹⁰ In contrast, by the early 1900s, Argentina and Chile had extended their administrative control over most of their continental and proximate maritime lands and had solved their core territorial disputes.¹¹ Therefore, it was natural that they started to look to further maritime expansion as a projection of their respective growing economies, populations, and relevance in the global community of nations.

In Argentina, the first manifestations of interest in Antarctica appeared in the late 1800s when the *Instituto Geográfico Argentino* [Argentine Geographical Institute], a private scientific institute that included prominent figures from the political and academic circles of Buenos Aires, financed an Antarctic expedition.¹² The exploration of Antarctica was regarded as a national responsibility, and the project contained many elements that would later define the attitude of Argentina—and similarly Chile—about Antarctica.¹³ The expedition found weak support in government—something shared by most Antarctic expeditions at the time—and was redesigned as a geographical exploration of southern Patagonia to strengthen Argentina's position in its territorial dispute with Chile over the area.¹⁴ Before the close of the century other proposals appeared but failed to materialise.¹⁵ For its part, Chile's involvement in the Antarctic began in

10 The lack of an effective reaction by the Argentines to the US (in 1831–32) and the British (in 1833, resulting in the takeover of the Islands) ousting its citizens from the Falklands/Malvinas could be considered a sign of such limitation. On the 1831–33 Falklands/Malvinas events, see: Christian J. Maisch, 'The Falkland/Malvinas Islands Clash of 1831–32: US and British Diplomacy in the South Atlantic', *Diplomatic History*, 24.2 (2000): 185–209.

11 By 1902 all major disputes between Argentina and Chile regarding the Andes range boundary had been solved, and only the dispute over delimitation along the Magellan Strait remained. Octavio Errázuriz Guilisasti and Germán Carrasco Domínguez, *Las Relaciones Chileno-Argentinas Durante La Presidencia de Riesco, 1901-1906* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Andres Bello, 1968); Cameron G. Thies, 'International Interactions Territorial Nationalism in Spatial Rivalries: An Institutional Account of the Argentine-Chilean Rivalry', *International Interactions*, 27.4 (2001): 399–431.

12 The *Instituto Geográfico Argentino* [Argentine Geographic Institute], a non-governmental scientific organisation, should not be confused with the *Instituto Geográfico Nacional* [National Geographic Institute], the Argentine government's cartographic institute. Argentina's first expedition was the initiative of the Italian Lieutenant Giacomo Bove (a member of Adolf E. Nordenfjöld's expedition to the North Pole) who presented the idea to the Italian government but did not obtain official support. When the Argentines heard of Bove's intentions, they offered their support. Bove replied by offering that the Argentine government take the entire enterprise under its wing.

13 See Giacomo Bove, *Expedición Austral Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Instituto Geográfico Argentino, 1883), and a similar discourse in Francisco Seguí, 'Las Regiones Polares', *Boletín Del Instituto Geográfico Argentino*, XVIII (1897), 30–32.

14 An account of the government attitudes on early Antarctic exploration is present in Ignacio Javier Cardone, *A Continent for Peace and Science : Antarctic Science and International Politics from the 6th International Geographical Congress to the Antarctic Treaty (1895–1959)*, (Ph. D. dissertation, University of São Paulo and King's College London, 2019), Chapter 2.

15 Pablo Fontana, *La Pugna Antártica: El Conflicto Por El Sexto Continente* (Buenos Aires: Guazuvirá Ediciones, 2014), 26–27.

1902 through the issuing of fishing licences.¹⁶ But, as in Argentina, there was no official strategy or position defining its activities on the white continent.

This changed as both countries became increasingly involved with early Antarctic exploration due to their role as gateways for European expeditions to those regions. Their major and southern ports were key to the preparation and passage of ships heading south; this gave both countries a sense of proximity that no other country could claim. Furthermore, from early in the century, a geopolitical perspective of the continent emerged in Argentina and Chile—the popularity of explorers heading south encouraged the governments to offer their assistance and cooperation, which also gave them a loose sense of ownership.

Early examples of Argentina's involvement with the Antarctic include the establishment of a first class magnetic and meteorological observatory in the Isla de los Estados [Staten Island] to collaborate with the 'great international Antarctic campaign'; the participation of Sub-lieutenant José María Sobral in the Swedish Otto Nordenskjöld expedition of 1901–03 (Sobral was one of the shipwrecked crew that was finally rescued by the Argentine navy after having to spend a second winter isolated on Antarctica); and the transfer of the administration of Scottish explorer W.S. Bruce's observatory on Laurie Island in the South Orkney group to the Argentine government.¹⁷ In a decision that held important symbolic appeal, one Argentine official sent to the Laurie Island observatory was appointed postmaster general on a temporary basis. The Argentine government notably also provided assistance to the French explorer Jean Baptiste Charcot and attempted to establish two more meteorological stations on South Georgia Island and Booth [Wandell] Island to work in concert with the one on Laurie Island.¹⁸ The Argentine government appointed two

16 Carlos de Toro Alvarez, 'Vinculación Histórica Del Territorio Continental y La Antártica', in *Política Antártica de Chile* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Universitaria – Instituto de Estudios Internacionales de la Universidad de Chile, 1984), p. 56; Guiliastri and Domínguez, *Relaciones Chileno-Argentinas*, pp. 93–94; Oscar Pinochet de la Barra, 'Chile y Argentina En La Antártida: Algunas Reflexiones', *Boletín Antártico Chileno*, 20.1 (2001): 4.

17 It was common in Latin America to describe the first waves of Antarctic scientific expeditions (between 1897 and 1905) as 'international'. See: Ricardo Capdevila and Santiago M. Comerci, *Historia Antártica Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Dirección Nacional del Antártico, 1986), p. 47; Otto Nordenskjöld, 'The New Era in South-Polar Exploration', *The North American Review*, 183.601 (1906: 759; Rudmose Brown, Robert Neal, R. C. Mossman, and J. H. Harvey Pirie, *The Voyage of the 'Scotia': Being the Record of a Voyage of Exploration in Antarctic Seas* (William Blackwood and Sons, 1906), p. ix. On the transference of Bruce's station to Argentina, see: Geoffrey N. Swinney, 'Some new perspectives on the life of William Spiers Bruce (1867–1921), with a preliminary catalogue of the Bruce collection of manuscripts in the University of Edinburgh', *Archives of Natural History*, 28.3 (2001): 285–311; and 'The Scottish National Antarctic expedition (1902–04) and the founding of Base Orcadas', *Scottish Geographical Journal* 123.1 (2007): 48–67.

18 The Argentine government planned to establish a network of three meteorological stations: on Laurie Island; on South Georgia, and on Booth [Wandell] Island, west of the Antarctic peninsula. However, the last-named of these could not be established (Capdevila and Comerci, *Historia*, p. 65–66).

commissioners to act as authorities on Laurie and Booth islands, although the commissioner assigned to Booth never assumed his position there as the planned station was never established.¹⁹

These events coincided with the early development of whaling in Antarctica through the establishment of the *Compañía Argentina de Pesca S.A.* in Grytviken, South Georgia.²⁰ Drawing on Argentine capital, the rapid success of the company attracted new competition, which raised the question of ownership of the region.²¹ The requirement by the British Government in the Islas Malvinas [the Falkland Islands] that the company request a licence for operating on the island led to a series of negotiations, which were concluded in an amicable settlement. The *Compañía* and the British government stopped short of resorting to an official diplomatic exchange, thus avoiding political conflict with the Argentines.²²

At that time, neither Argentina nor Chile had any strategic designs on Antarctica. This changed in 1906 when the Chileans began studying the Antarctic question, having realised the economic potential of whaling; the Chileans based their claims on a need for 'territorial integrity'.²³ In 1906, the Chilean Minister of Foreign Affairs considered sending an Antarctic expedition to establish a meteorological station and requested that the Chilean government extend its sovereignty '...over the vast southern islands and the southern continent...'. He appointed an 'Antarctic Commission',²⁴ which led to the first conversations between Argentina and Chile regarding Antarctica, with a view to agreeing on mutually recognised borders. However, the commission was dissolved soon after the discussions were initiated—a treaty was never signed and the plan for the expedition never implemented. Political disagreements between the Argentine President, José Figueroa Alcorta, and his negotiator, Minister of Foreign Affairs

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19 Capdevila and Comerci, *Historia*, p. 66.

20 For the history of the *Compañía Argentina de Pesca S.A.* and its role on the development of Antarctic whaling see: Ian B. Hart, *Pesca: The History of Compañía Argentina de Pesca Sociedad Anónima of Buenos Aires* (Aidan Ellis Publishing, 2001).

21 See: David Day, *Antarctica: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); and Fontana, *La Pugna*.

22 The participation of an Argentine government official on the board of the *Compañía* was considered enough recognition of British sovereignty, while any official communication could have embarrassed the Argentine government and forced it to protest. See: Gorst to Hartford, 31 March 1906. FO371/4. TNA/UK.

23 In a letter from the Foreign Relations Minister, Antonio Huneeus, to the Chilean Minister of Marine, on 2 July 1906, the former expresses that 'The commercial or agricultural value of the territories to which I refer [Antarctica] holds a secondary importance to the Government. The primary considerations that move it are the obligation to consolidate its sovereignty rights over the integrity of the National Territory...' Antonio Huneeus, *Antártida* (Santiago de Chile: Imprenta Chile, 1948) p. 43 [author's translation].

24 See: Huneeus, *Antártida*, Annex I, II, & III [author's translation of cited paragraph section]. Also: de Toro Alvarez, *Vinculación Histórica*; Guilisasti and Domínguez, *Relaciones Chileno-Argentinas*; and Pinochet de la Barra, *Chile y Argentina*.

Estanislao Zeballos, led to Zeballos's resignation and the suspension of the negotiations.²⁵ These were the first diplomatic exchanges over the conflicting positions of Argentina, Chile, and the United Kingdom.²⁶ Antarctica's relatively minor importance—despite the growing economic value of whaling—meant that all three countries opted for a strategy of avoidance to protect their other reciprocal and more prominent commercial interests.

As Antarctic exploration progressed during the 'heroic age' and whaling developed, the United Kingdom adopted a more proactive attitude, issuing, in 1908, Letters Patent that defined what the government described as the Falkland Islands Dependencies (FID).²⁷ The region encompassed a territory defined as lying between 20° and 80° west longitude and south of 50° south latitude; that is, located directly to the south of the South American continent.²⁸ For the British, this unilateral declaration of rights was considered sufficient to assert their ownership. However, the declaration passed mostly unnoticed, probably considered an internal British administrative act of no significance.

A lack of reaction on the part of Chile and Argentina was coupled with an absence of any defined policy towards Antarctica within and between the two neighbours—an absence that could be attributed to domestic political instability, residual distrust from earlier territorial disputes, and remaining tensions over the Beagle Channel (a bitter dispute about the possession of the Picton, Lennox, and Nueva islands, located South of Tierra del Fuego).²⁹ Argentine and Chilean efforts directed at Antarctica, like those of many European countries, were sporadic and fragmented. With the exception of the Laurie Island observatory, which maintained Argentina's continuous presence in the region, and the multi-

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25 See: Carolina Bugueño and Pablo Mancilla, 'Una Aproximación a Las Controversias Diplomáticas Entre Chile, Argentina y Gran Bretaña En El Continente Antártico, 1906–1961', *Revista de Historia de América*, 136 (2005): 10–11; Miryam Colacrai, *Reflexiones En Torno Al Régimen Antártico y Las Relaciones Argentino-Chilenas, Cuadernos de Política Exterior Argentina* (Rosario: Centro de Estudios en Relaciones Internacionales de Rosario (CERIR), 2003) p. 17; Fontana, *La Pugna*, p. 45; and Pinochet de la Barra, *Chile y Argentina*, p. 5–6. Zeballos was the founder and first President of the *Instituto Geográfico Argentino*, the same institution that proposed the first Argentine Antarctic expedition.

26 Bugueño and Mancilla, *Una Aproximación*, p. 10.

27 They would be amended in 1917.

28 Ben Saul and Tim Stephens (eds), *Antarctica in International Law* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2015): 831–32.

29 See: Fontana, *La Pugna*, p. 40–42; The islands held importance because their possession would change the extension to the South of the border between the two countries. The dispute led the two countries to the brink of war in 1978, but war was avoided after a papal mediation and the call for a referendum in Argentina that resulted in general approval of the concession of the islands to Chile. For more about the Beagle Channel dispute, see: Pablo Lacoste, 'La Disputa por El Beagle y el papel de los actores no estatales argentinos', *Universum (Tula)*, 19.1 (2004): 86–109; Mark Laudy, 'The Vatican Mediation of the Beagle Channel Dispute: Crisis Intervention and Forum Building', in Greenberg, Barton, and McGuinness, *Words Over War: Mediation and Arbitration to Prevent Deadly Conflict*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000) p. 293–320; M. Mirow, 'International Law and Religion in Latin America: The Beagle Channel Dispute', *Suffolk Transnational Law Review*, 28 (2004): 1–29.

national character of the whaling companies, neither Argentina nor Chile had any other activities in Antarctica.

Although limited, the involvement of both countries was far from being insignificant. Chile's rescue, in 1917, of crew members from Shackleton's *Endurance* expedition that had been stranded on Elephant Island using the small cargo vessel *Yelcho* constituted a key moment in Chile's Antarctic story. The Chilean government represented this as a significant event; it engaged the popular imagination and would have important repercussions for the future Chilean position. Of particular importance is the fact that the expedition was, in practical terms, 'neglected' by the British government.³⁰ With limited resources, but great determination, the Chilean government acceded to the British call to assist the expedition and rescued the shipwrecked party, laying the groundwork for a future Chilean conceptualisation of Antarctic involvement. As had happened with Sub-lieutenant Sobral in Argentina, Luis Alberto Pardo Villalón, or Piloto Pardo, captain of the *Yelcho*, would be installed as an icon of Chile's Antarctic national commitment.³¹

2. Antarctica as part of Chilean and Argentine national identity

By 1920, the British were planning the complete inclusion of the Antarctic within their Empire.³² The Colonial Office elaborated a detailed report concluding that only France held some right to Antarctic land, downgrading any Argentine claim within the 'miscellaneous' section and neglecting any Chilean interest.³³ This stemmed from a fundamental difference between the British and the South American perspectives about the source of rights. For the British, territorial rights derived mainly from discovery and formal acts of taking possession, while for the South Americans emphasis was on inherited Hispanic legal titles and the geographical connection between the southern tip of South America and the

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30 Due to the British involvement in the war in Europe it was considered that no resources could be spared to assist the expeditioners. In 1914, Churchill, being first lord of the Admiralty, had already characterised Shackleton's enterprise as a 'sterile quest' (Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition 1914-15: ADM 1/8368/29. TNA/UK). Later, while in Flanders in 1916, Churchill wrote to his wife expressing annoyance about the need to assist that expedition. (Winston to Clementine, 28 March 1916. CSCT 2/9. CAC/UK).

31 On Sobral's participation in Nordenfjöld's Antarctic expedition 1901-03 and the Argentine rescue of its crew see: Tamara Sandra Culleton, 'Argentina y El Rescate a La Expedición Antártica de Otto Nodenskjöld (1901-1903): Una Mirada Desde La Prensa de La Época', *Revista Estudios Hemisféricos y Polares*, 6.4 (2015): 1-15. On the Chilean rescue of Shackleton's expedition see: Consuelo León Wöppke and Mauricio Jara Fernández (eds), *El Piloto Luis Pardo Villalón: Visiones Desde La Prensa, 1916* (Santiago de Chile: LW Editorial, 2015).

32 Lambert to the Under Secretary of State of the Foreign Office, 5 December 1919. ADM1/8565/226. TNA/UK.

33 Territorial Claims in the Antarctic. ADM1/8565/226. TNA/UK.

Antarctic peninsula.³⁴ Deriving legitimacy from the geographical and geological connection between the two landmasses, the Antarctic peninsula was seen as a natural projection of the South American continent to uninhabited proximal lands.³⁵

Whatever the origin of British neglect of South American claims, it would not last long. In February 1925, the Argentines decided to install a permanent wireless station on Laurie Island.³⁶ Not only was such a station a natural development of Argentina's ongoing investment in the Island, it also held symbolic importance, linking the Antarctic region and the Argentine mainland. It was presented as an expression of effective administration through the development of communication and infrastructure, a subtle authoritative claim over the group of islands and, indirectly, over a largely still undefined region.

By June of the same year, the British delegation in Buenos Aires complained about the absence of a licence request to the British government, proposing that it would be granted, nonetheless. Argentina responded saying that regarding '...wireless stations constructed in Argentine territory, the republic would act in accordance with the provisions of the International Radiotelegraphic Conventions...'.³⁷ The British responded that the Argentines were 'unclear', as they were unwilling to consider claims of Argentine sovereignty over islands they perceived as undisputedly British. With neither party willing to acknowledge the other's position, the two countries avoided a potential clash through diplomatic wording. By extending a 'golden bridge', the British expected to obtain some recognition from the Argentine government without creating a major conflict that would damage important British commercial and financial dealings with Argentina.

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34 Scott differentiates three waves of Antarctic Imperialism: i) Spanish and Portuguese expansion, which divided the globe based on the Papal Bulls of 3 and 4 May 1493; ii) British expansion, developed through the 19th century up to World War I, during which time the 'uncivilized' lands were considered *terra nullius* over which acquisition by discovery and 'effective occupation' was possible; and iii) US expansion, which exerted hegemony making use of international institutions. Shirley V. Scott, 'Three Waves of Antarctic Imperialism', in Klaus Dodds, Alan D Hemmings, and Peder Roberts (eds), *Handbook on the Politics of Antarctica*, (Cheltenham – Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2017), p. 37–49.

35 This question was linked to the discussions about the extension of national maritime rights to adjacent waters that had been taking place since beginning of the 20th century. Eventually, those discussions led to a conference called by the League of Nations in 1930 in The Hague. The conference was unsuccessful. A definition of the extension of continental shelf was eventually agreed upon in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (Art 76). This discussion is complex and exceeds the objectives of the present work.

36 Argentine Claims, Territorial Claims in the Antarctic, 1 May 1945. A4311/365/8. NAA/Aus.
37 *Ibid*.

In 1926, the British Imperial Conference made explicit its imperialist intentions in Antarctica. Argentina and Chile were once more neglected in these deliberations.³⁸ However, in March 1927 the Argentine station on Laurie Island became operational. Once the British became aware of the situation, they consulted the International Telegraph Bureau, which informed them that Argentina had sent notification of their station two years previous in such a way that assumed sovereignty over the Islands. This triggered another series of diplomatic exchanges, which included a proposal to open negotiations for the transfer of the South Orkney Islands from British to Argentine rule, requiring the Argentines to recognise prior British sovereignty.³⁹

The situation became even more critical when Britain learned that the Argentine government had informed the International Post Office in Switzerland that the postal jurisdiction of Argentina extended to the South Orkneys and South Georgia. Further protests to the Argentine government came to nothing, and eventually the British Ambassador in Buenos Aires recommended the Foreign Office avoid conflict over this issue and prioritise good relations with Argentina.

In keeping with this official attitude, other Argentine initiatives also aimed at strengthening the country's sense of possessing these southern regions. In 1927, José Manuel Moneta, at that time head of the Argentine meteorological station on Laurie Island, shot a documentary film entitled *Entre los hielos de las islas Orcadas* [Within the Frozen Lands of the South Orkneys]. Using a style that differed completely from that of previous films about the expeditions of the 'heroic age of Antarctic exploration', Moneta's film stressed the permanent character of the Argentine settlement and the continuity of the activities developed there.⁴⁰

Until just before the Second World War, little consideration was given to Antarctic questions in Argentina and Chile. For Argentina, their operations on Laurie Island represented an undeniable title to the archipelago, while the presence of the *Compañía Argentina de Pesca S.A.* in South Georgia and the operation of a meteorological station on that island by Argentine personnel established an

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38 See: Imperial Conference, 1926. ADM116/2494. TNA/UK.

39 The negotiations failed. Previously, between 1911 and 1914, both countries had maintained negotiations to exchange the South Orkneys for a parcel of land in Buenos Aires city to install the British Legation. (See: Lowes to Bart, 20 March 1914. CO78/132. TNA/UK. There are several other documents in that file as well as in CO78/128 and CO78/129).

40 Pablo Fontana, 'Between the ice of the Orkney Islands: filming the beginnings of the Antarctic overwintering tradition', *The Polar Journal* 9.2 (2019), 340–57.

Argentine presence that was ill defined internationally.⁴¹ But as the international economic crisis derived from the market crash of 1929 intensified the processes of industrialisation and the subsequent urbanisation of the world periphery, nationalist movements began to arise inspired by the apparent successes of fascist movements in Italy, Spain, and Germany.

With tensions rising in Europe, suggesting an imminent war of global proportions, the international order was destabilised, and new opportunities arose for emerging nations. Germany openly defied the established political hegemony; this inspired several countries to openly defy British dominance in a chain reaction. An invitation issued by Norway in 1938 to participate in its upcoming International Exhibition of Polar Exploration to be held in Bergen in 1940 triggered a reaction in Argentina and Chile. They saw the exhibition as an opportunity to raise the issue of sovereignty in Antarctica. The South American countries feared that the event would result in the division of the white continent between the central European powers. To avoid being outmanoeuvred, both countries took steps to set the foundations for specific national Antarctic policies.

In June 1939, Argentine President Ortiz formed a provisional National Antarctic Commission so that his government might assess issues related to the Bergen exhibition. It was formed by three members: Dr Isidoro Ruiz Moreno, an International Relations specialist; Alfredo Galmarini, an engineer who worked at the Ministry of Agriculture; and Captain Francisco Clariza of the Argentine Navy. The Chilean commission would be formed just a few months later in September,⁴² created under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and composed of International Legalist Julio Escudero Guzmán and Commander Enrique Cordovez Madariaga, a retired Naval Captain and director of the Hydrographic Service of Chile. Just a few months later, with war already ravaging Europe, the Bergen exhibition was postponed indefinitely, but its effect on Argentina and Chile would endure.

At the close of April 1940, Argentina's National Antarctic Commission was constituted as a permanent body by decree. It aimed to '...centralise and be responsible for the consideration and handling of all matters connected with

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41 The British position was otherwise. A licence for the Meteorological station was conceded as part of a leasing agreement with the company.

42 There was a previous Chilean Antarctic Commission in 1906 (Huneeus, *Antartida*). However, it was short-lived and ended after a change in the Presidency.

the defence and development of Argentine interests in the Antarctic...'.⁴³ The following month, the Commission delivered a detailed report in which they advanced several recommendations, including the immediate resumption of talks with Chile, the development of a permanent programme of Antarctic exploration, and the study of the economic potential of its natural resources.⁴⁴ Domestically, the report recommended staging a permanent Antarctic exhibition in the Argentine Museum of Natural Sciences as a way to promote public interest, and to disseminate information about Antarctica in the educational system. In addition, externally, it was recommended to call an international conference in Buenos Aires to debate the political aspects of Antarctic sovereignty and the establishment of a legal framework for activities in the region. This strategy aimed to increase domestic awareness about Antarctica and raise the international profile of Argentina as an Antarctic actor in support of activities in the Orkney Islands and the planned Antarctic exploration programme.

The news from Argentina caused some concern in Britain but was minimised due to the more urgent question of war in Europe. However, in mid-July, the British Embassy in Buenos Aires delivered a note enclosing a map of Antarctica and a descriptive booklet issued by the Government of Australia, which included all of Britain's claims. The publication drew a response from the Argentine government stating that it had never recognised the sovereignty of any other State to any portion of Antarctica. Moreover, it stated that Argentina asserted '... dominion over a zone to which occupation, geographical proximity and the sector formed by prolongation of the American Continent afford it just title...', and called for an international conference of states with claimed to '...determine a juridico-political status of that region...'. In closing, the letter reasserted the Argentine position that the Falkland/Malvinas Islands were an inalienable piece of territory in which Britain was an illegitimate *de facto* occupier.⁴⁵

While the diplomatic exchange did not result in any significant outcome, it set out the main Argentine strategy for dealing with the Antarctic question. First, it established three principles on which the Argentine position would be constructed: permanent occupation, based on the operation of the Laurie

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43 Argentine Decree No. 61,852.M.97. Enclosure to Cranbourne to the Prime Minister of Australia, 15 October 1940. A981/ANT45. NAA/Aus; and Expediente N° 45. AH/0009/21. AHC/Arg.

44 Informe General - Comisión Nacional del Antartico, May 1940. Exp. 13. AH/0003/12. AHC/Arg.

45 Translation of an enclosure to Buenos Aires dispatch No. 251, dated 13 September 1940. A981/ANT45. NAA/Aus. The link between the Falklands/Malvinas question and the Antarctic would be permanent until the signature of the Antarctic Treaty of 1959; this topic lies outside the scope of the present paper.

Island station since 1904; geographical proximity, Argentina being the closest country to the continent other than Chile; and geological connection, according to the hypothesis of the continuance of the American Andes in the Antarctic Peninsula. Furthermore, by denying the legitimacy of the British occupation of the Falkland/Malvinas Islands and asserting its continuing protest, Argentina expected that the idea of 'colonial dependencies' would also be delegitimised. Seeking wider regional support, Argentina also expressed its position at the Pan-American Conference on cooperation and trade taking place in Havana that year; both South American countries stated their reservations based on the view that rights over Antarctica were rooted in the projection of geographical influence and not—as was the British argument—from geographical discovery.

Following the recommendation of the Antarctic Commission, the Argentine government published its own map of Antarctica demarcating an Argentine sector between 25° and 74° west longitude.⁴⁶ That publication brought protests from Chile. On 6 November 1940, President Pedro Aguirre Cerda issued a decree declaring all territories lying between 53° and 90° west longitude to be under Chilean sovereignty.⁴⁷ The Chilean decree was worded so as to indicate it was not establishing a claim to discovered territory, but defining the boundaries of parts of its territory, to which geographical, historical, legal and diplomatic foundations provided a precedent right. Referring to the studies conducted in 1906 and in 1939 but without making explicit the content of the alleged basis, the decree stated the limits of the Chilean territory on the '...part that extends through the polar region denominated as American Antarctica.'⁴⁸ The Chilean decree was a bold strategic move based on a communicative action, intended to install Chile within Antarctic international relations in the face of a relatively precarious situation due to its lack of activity or presence in the Antarctic regions.⁴⁹

The Chilean decree was received with contempt in Argentina and elsewhere, particularly because until that time Chile had had little involvement of note with Antarctica. Nonetheless, the action was effective in placing Chile on the map. With severe budgetary limitations and little to show in terms of historical involvement, Chile was able to secure, in a single formal act, the impact that

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46 Fontana, *La Pugna*, 108.

47 Decree N° 1747 of 6 November 1940.

48 *Ibid.*

49 Although the decree was merely a domestic legal document, it was meant to be a declaration to the international community rather than an instrument of domestic administrative jurisdiction.

others had struggled so hard to obtain. Moreover, on 11 December, Manuel Bianchi, the Chilean Minister of Foreign Affairs, suggested to the Minister of Defence that this territorial claim be included in any map or publication made by the Ministry.⁵⁰

The extent of the territory claimed by Chile was carefully designed to give them some bargaining power in case of any eventual international negotiation, particularly with regard to the claims of Argentina and the United Kingdom, while at the same time avoiding territory potentially to be included in a US claim. The Chileans declared to the Argentines that the decree was made with an open mind in relation to possibly establishing an agreed border between the two countries in Antarctica.⁵¹ Despite the fact that the US expressed disgust and surprise at the Chilean attitude and repeated its historic position of not recognising any claim in Antarctica,⁵² the strategy was successful; at least in the sense that it located Chile among the international Antarctic actors. For its part, Argentina had to overcome the first shock of distrust with regard to Chile's overlapping claim before its intention to establish a common position with Chile could regain momentum. While the distrust did not disappear, Argentina and Chile made arrangements to establish preliminary talks over their respective Antarctic territories over the following months.

3. An American Antarctica: the unpredictable consequences of a strategic concept

The origin of the concept 'American Antarctica' is probably attributable to the Chilean geographer Luis Riso Patrón, member of the Chilean Antarctic Commission of 1906 and who, in 1908, defined the region as 'part of the Antarctic lands located within the external meridians of the American continent, that is from the South Sandwich Group, on latitude 55°, up to the Peter 1st Islands (70° S)'.⁵³ With no political implication—at least explicitly—the definition was motivated by the geographical conception of the Antarctic peninsula as constituting a geological continuation of the South American

50 Bianchi to Minister of National Defence, 11 December 1940. Fondo Histórico/Vol. 1875. AGH/Chl.

51 Adrian Howkins, 'Icy Relations: The Emergence of South American Antarctica during the Second World War', *Polar Record*, 42.2 (2006), p. 153–65.

52 Felipe A Espil, [Argentine Ambassador in Washington] to Dr. Julio Argentino Roca (Hijo) [Minister of Foreign Affairs], 9 November 1940. Expediente N° 14. AH/0003/2. AHC/Arg.

53 Luis Riso Patrón, 'La Antártida Americana', *Anales de La Universidad de Chile*, 122 (1908), p. 250.

Mention of an 'American Antarctic region' was recorded in the memorandum of the first meeting of the Chilean Antarctic Commission in 1906 (Huneeus, *Antartida*, 45). However, the first formal definition of the concept can be found in Riso Patrón's work of 1908.

continent. However, in 1941, after the Chilean decree and the resumption of Argentine-Chilean negotiations, the concept acquired political significance.

The idea of an American sector of Antarctica had also been put forward by the US when, in 1939, it had stated to both South American countries that it would pursue an 'open door policy' with the 21 American republics for any economic resource found in the Antarctic sector lying south of the American continent.⁵⁴ The communication also signalled the subtle idea of a condominium of the American Antarctic sector to all those 21 republics—an idea considered 'absurd' by the Chileans.⁵⁵ What Chile understood 'American Antarctica' to mean was the idea of a portion of Antarctica being 'connected' to the American mainland, not that it should be the shared property of all the American republics. A similar attitude was adopted in Argentina, particularly because it favoured a common enterprise against British imperialism. Thus, an American Antarctica was less a shared space than the constitution of a common front against a foreign power—something also present in the US communication.⁵⁶

This concept was addressed in the negotiations between Argentina and Chile in 1941. The two countries failed to reach an agreement but their talks led to a mutual recognition of their exclusive rights to the American sector of Antarctica, concluding that: 'There is an American Antarctica that is an integral part of the Western Hemisphere.'⁵⁷ They resolved to continue talks the following year, but that was not to be. Nevertheless, the declaration was important, presenting a common front that not only refuted British claims to the so-called Falkland Island Dependencies but also blocked potential US claims or an advancement of the idea of a continental condominium.⁵⁸ However, the concept contained

54 History and Current Status of Claims in Antarctica, March 1948, p. 23. RG 330. NARA/MD/USA; and Memorandum Confidential, 12 January 1940. Expediente n°11. AH/0003/10. AHC/Arg.

55 Bianchi to the Chilean Ambassador in Washington, 19 December 1940. Fondo Histórico/Vol. 1823. AGH/Chl.

56 While Genest states that the alliance between Argentina and Chile was a consequence of common interests, Howkins contends that the idea of an American Antarctica arose as a consequence of the differences between Argentina and Chile (Eugenio A Genest, *Antártida Sudamericana: aportes para su comprensión* (Buenos Aires: Dirección Nacional del Antártico - Instituto Antártico Argentino, 2001); and Howkins, *Icy Relations*). However, at least the Argentine initiative to resume negotiations was inspired by a sincere sentiment of brotherhood and solidarity. See: Comisión Nacional del Antártico - Informe General - Mayo 1940. Expediente N° 13. AH/0003/12. AHC/Arg.

57 For the acts of the meetings see: Copias de las Actas Firmadas en Santiago de Chile..., 4 June 1941. Expediente N° 16. AH/0003/4. AHC/Arg. (author's translation)

58 The Chilean representative rejected the idea of extending the west limit of the 'American Antarctica' to the sector explored by US expeditions. The idea was to discourage any potential claim by the US to the 'unclaimed sector' in a declaration in which they had not participated. See: Informe del Delegado Argentino Dr. Moreno, 2 April 1941. Expediente N° 16. AH/0003/4. AHC/Arg.

an essential contradiction—while designed to facilitate unity against extra-continental actors, it was also meant to exclude other actors on the continent.⁵⁹

Nevertheless, as far as no other continental actor besides the US was expressing any active interest in Antarctica, the concept was allowed to stand, and was further legitimised in Pan-American fora.⁶⁰ The end of the Second World War did little to diminish the appeal of the concept. In 1945, one of the original members of the Chilean Antarctic Commission, Captain Enrique Cordovez, who had participated in 1943 as an observer on the Argentine Antarctic expedition, published a book entitled *La Antártida Sudamericana*.⁶¹ The book offered a geographical, biological, and physical account of Antarctica, and also advanced the Chilean position regarding Antarctica, framed by the idea of an Argentine-Chilean sector of the continent. Despite the mistrust and jealousy that characterised Chilean sentiment toward Argentine activities in Antarctica, Cordovez praised Argentine-Chilean cooperation and defended the existence of a sector of Antarctica that belonged exclusively to these two countries.⁶²

The concept was further interpreted as a corollary of the Monroe Doctrine in the context of the Cold War—not in its original unilateral interpretation regarding limits on European colonisation, but with a view to revised continental solidarity. After the war, re-invigorated in its leading role on the continent, the US established a clear hegemony by reframing the Monroe Doctrine along the lines of the anti-communist struggle. This neo-Monroviaism may well have emboldened both Latin American countries in their attitudes toward the British.⁶³ Argentina and Chile further advanced the idea of Antarctica as an extension of the American continent in the 1947 American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance—usually known as the Rio Pact or TIAR according to the Spanish acronym. Even with US objections to its inclusion, the Treaty defined the zone

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59 There was a concern in Ruiz Moreno's view about the possibility of a Brazilian claim to Antarctica. See: *Ibid.*, p.3.

60 There were doubts about the convenience of referring to the concept of 'American Antarctica', 'South American Antarctica' or referring to an 'American Sector of Antarctica'. See: *Ibid.* and Dictamen de los Miembros Técnicos, 7 May 1941. Expediente N° 16. AH/0003/4. AHC/Arg.

61 Enrique Cordovez Madariaga, *La Antártida Sudamericana* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Nascimento, 1945).

62 For more on the Chilean reactions to Argentine activities during the 1943 campaign see: Enclosed Report presented by Captain (E) Enrique Cordovez in Naval Attaché to Director of Naval Intelligence, 23 August 1943, ADM116/4931, TNA/UK; on Cordovez's views on the book, see: Mauricio Jara Fernández, 'Enrique Cordovez Madariaga y Su Visión de La Antártida Sudamericana a Medios de La Década de 1940', *Revista de Historia*, 11–12 (2002), 23–26; Howkins, *Icy Relations*.

63 It is important to note that, in 1946, the US undertook the greatest military operation ever attempted in Antarctica, *Operation Highjump*, which demonstrated its superior polar capabilities.

of inter-continental defence to include the Antarctic sector between 24° and 90° west longitude.⁶⁴

Eventually, the concept backfired to the detriment of the original intentions of Argentina and Chile. Some actors in other Latin American countries promoted a wider distribution of American Antarctica between the South American countries, echoed by the position of geographer Terezinha de Castro in Brazil in the 1950s.⁶⁵ Castro emphasised many principles defended by the promoters of an American Antarctica in Argentina and Chile—inherited colonial and historical rights, continental contiguity, and hemispherical defence.

4. Popular appeal and the trap of nationalist discourse

Following the 1940 plan, Argentina had already strengthened its position in Antarctica by sending exploratory expeditions in 1941 and 1943, performing several symbolic acts of taking possession and installing markers and navigation signals that could be displayed as a demonstration of effective presence.⁶⁶ Unable to conduct its own expeditions due to limited resources, Chile had to content itself with sending three observers on the 1943 Argentine expedition. This action served to cement an image of partnership, even when suspicion and jealousy continued to characterise the relations between the two countries.⁶⁷

At this time, both governments were headed by presidents who employed a nationalist discourse. Perón in Argentina and González Videla in Chile used Antarctica as a significant symbol of nationalism against Britain's declining imperialism.⁶⁸ The end of the Second World War did not diminish the force of nationalist discourse and popular appeal of South America's governments. After the war, both countries were able to send national expeditions to Antarctica. Chile finally fulfilled its promise to take Argentine observers on a national

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64 [Article 4 of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance](#) (Retrieved 30 July 2019).

65 'Boletim Geográfico', *Boletim Geográfico*, XVII.150 (1959); Delgado de Carvalho and Terezinha de Castro, 'A Questão Antártica', *Boletim Geográfico*, XIV.135 (1956), 502–6; Terezinha de Castro, *Rumo à Antártica* (Rio de Janeiro: Freitas Bastos, 1976).

66 For a chronology of activities see: Fontana, *La Pugna*.

67 See: Enclosed Report presented by Captain Enrique Cordovez, 23 Aug 1943: ADM116/4931. TNA/UK and Territorial Claims in the Antarctic by Research Department, Foreign Office, 1 May 1945: A4311/365/8. NAA/Aus.

68 Howkins, *Icy Relations*; Adrian Howkins, 'Frozen Empires: A History of the Antarctic Sovereignty Dispute between Britain, Argentina, and Chile, 1939–1959' (The University of Texas at Austin, 2008); Adrian Howkins, 'A Formal End to Informal Imperialism: Environmental Nationalism, Sovereignty Disputes, and the Decline of British Interests in Argentina, 1933–1955', *British Scholar*, III.2 (2010): 235–62.

expedition of its own, and Argentina resumed its previous activities. However, both countries had to face the strong British position in Antarctica established by *Operation Tabarin* during the war.⁶⁹

In 1946 Perón reinvigorated the Antarctic Commission by restructuring its membership and made mandatory the publication of the Antarctic sector on any map of Argentine territory.⁷⁰ The renewed Commission elaborated a plan of action for the effective occupation and administration of the 'Argentine sector' and considered alternatives for an international agreement.⁷¹ Emphasis was given to geographical exploration, meteorology, tidal research, and the potential for human, animal, and vegetal adaptability. Several actions, including acquiring polar equipment and establishing permanent stations, were suggested to fulfil those objectives.

In Chile, the inclusion of the Antarctic territory on all maps was also made mandatory, and the acquisition of a polar vessel enabled the planning of its first national Antarctic expedition in 1947. That same year, the two governments began negotiations related to the common boundary, which, in July 1947, resulted in a declaration in defence of a 'South-American Antarctica' and, in March 1948, the signature of the Donoso-La Rosa declaration in which both governments agreed to act in coordinated defence of their respective rights to the American sector of Antarctica.⁷² The next season, in 1948, Chilean President González Videla visited Antarctica to inaugurate the first permanent Chilean Antarctic base; he was the first President to set foot in Antarctica. The presidential visit was used as an opportunity to promote Chilean public opinion and attribute a sense of importance to the Antarctic question in the international arena. As President Pedro Aguirre Cerda had done with the decree in 1940, González drew on strong symbolism to force a place for Chile on the Antarctic stage.

Meanwhile, in 1948, the US had approached the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand in order to reach a preliminary agreement ahead of negotiations with

⁶⁹ *Operation Tabarin* was a secret naval operation allegedly designed to inhibit the activities of Nazi corsairs in the Southern Ocean. In fact, it forestalled Argentine activities in the Antarctic region. Despite its naval character, the operation established permanent Antarctic stations with mainly scientific personnel.

⁷⁰ Decree 8.944 of 2 September 1946. The decree made explicit the obligation to include the Antarctic sector and unified a diverse number of regulations that had been issued since 1935. The former Secretary of the Laurie Island Observatory, José Moneta, was designed Secretary of the reconstituted commission and would continue to be an influential figure in Argentine Antarctic matters.

⁷¹ Carlos A Rinaldi, 'Desarrollo Científico Argentino En La Antártida', *Boletín del Centro Naval*, 836 (2013): 148.

⁷² Carlos Aramayo Alzérreca, *Historia de La Antártida*, 2nd edn (Buenos Aires: Editorial Hemisferio, 1949), p. 357–60; Colacrai, *Reflexiones*, 18; Fontana, *La Pugna*, p. 186–87 and 199–200.

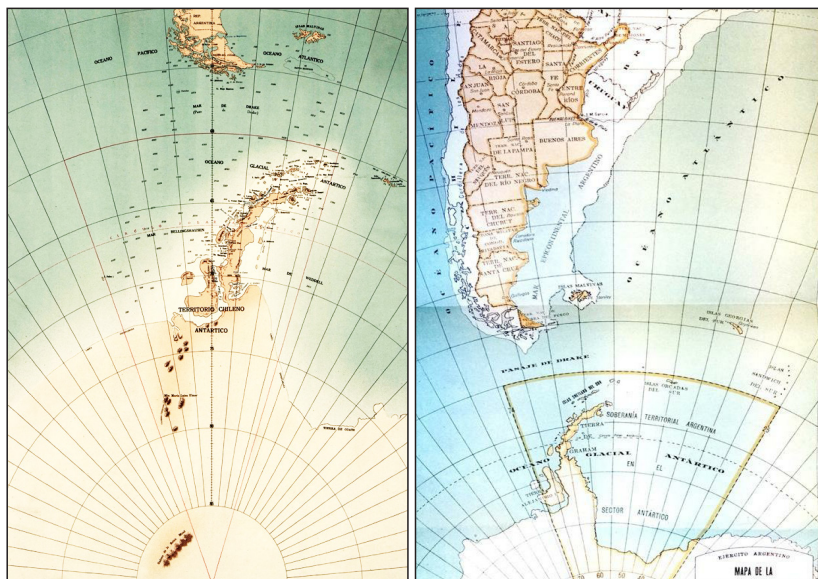


Figure 2. Maps Showing the Claimed Sectors of Argentina (left) and Chile (right). Source: Left: AH0003/20/Archivo Histórico de la Cancillería (Arg.). Right: 350485. Biblioteca Nacional Digital (Chile)

the South American countries.⁷³ However, when negotiations were made public, both countries immediately rejected the possibility of striking any agreement made without their participation. In August 1948, Professor Escudero of the Chilean National Antarctic Commission elaborated a moratorium proposal sent to the United States which envisioned a ‘standstill’ agreement for a duration of five years to facilitate international cooperation in scientific research.⁷⁴ However, the only agreement reached was a tripartite declaration not to send warships south of 60° south latitude other than those that had become customary over the years.⁷⁵ The heated nationalist discourse and contentious tone of journalism

73 A first proposal advanced the idea of a United Nations trustee but was abandoned as such a solution would necessarily include the Soviets as permanent members of the UN Security Council. In order to avoid that, the idea of a Trustee was replaced by a condominium between the seven claimant countries (Argentina, Australia, Chile, France, New Zealand, Norway, and the United Kingdom) and the US. For more on the roles of Argentina and Chile in establishing an Antarctic regime see Ignacio Javier Cardone and Pablo Gabriel Fontana, ‘Latin-American Contributions to the Creation of the Antarctic Regime’, *The Polar Journal*, 9.2 (2019): 300-323.

74 Reunidos en la ciudad de... Undated. FO371/74757. TNA/UK.

75 Howkins, *Frozen Empires*, p. 178-84.

in Argentina, the United Kingdom, and Chile did little to ease tempers, but the tripartite declaration guaranteed at least a basic level of consensus.⁷⁶ This declaration was reiterated annually, actively renewing the compromise.

In 1949, a young Colonel of the Argentine Army, Hernán Pujato, presented an ambitious plan that included: i) the effective presence of the Argentine Army on the Antarctic continent; ii) the establishment of a specific scientific institution; iii) the establishment of an Antarctic settlement; iv) the acquisition of an ice-breaker; and v) an expedition to reach the South Pole.⁷⁷ After initially ignoring Pujato's proposal, in late 1950 Perón approached the young colonel to assign him the task of organising a scientific expedition to the Antarctic. Pujato encountered several obstacles in the Argentine armed forces but eventually dispatched his first scientific expedition, after which the *Instituto Antártico Argentino 'Coronel Hernán Pujato'* was established. The institute's foundational aims were to guide, control, manage, and execute research and technical studies related to Argentine Antarctic activities in coordination with the National Antarctic Commission. The renewed character of these activities did not neglect the nationalist aims of scientific development in those latitudes. Scientific objectives were intertwined with national symbolism, such as the performance of 'acts of sovereignty' and the establishment of permanent bases covering a great expanse of the sector claimed.

Perón used Pujato's success to bolster his nationalist and anti-imperialist discourse. At every opportunity, Perón mentioned Argentine involvement in Antarctica to highlight its importance to the Argentine nation and to emphasise the heroism of the men who affirmed its sovereignty in those isolated and frozen lands. Many school textbooks published during Perón's presidency included content related to Argentina's claims to the Antarctic, as well as to the Malvinas.⁷⁸ Without being as incendiary as their neighbour, Chilean officials also incorporated the idea of national enterprise and heroism into speeches directed at the general public.

In 1952, an incident in Hope Bay on the Antarctic peninsula involved Argentine and British parties. The Argentine military kept the British from disembarking by threat of force. Strategically, Perón made an official apology for the excessive zeal shown by the officer in charge, while domestically he praised

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76 Ibid, 184.

77 Fontana, *La Pugna*, p. 215.

78 Amelia Beatriz García, 'Textos Escolares : Las Malvinas y la Antártida para la " Nueva Argentina " de Perón', *Antíteses*, 2.4 (2009): 1033–58.

the commander's attitude as 'patriotic' and 'heroic' in the press and in public discourse.⁷⁹ When, a year later, an incident on Deception Island ended in the British destruction of Argentine and Chilean bases and the forced detention of two Argentine officials, both governments attempted to keep the incident from public view; it was understood that any public acknowledgement could force a reaction against the UK.⁸⁰ Eventually the news came out, causing a strong public reaction, but no retaliation by either South American country followed. However, the Hope Bay and Deception Island incidents were a clear indication that the tripartite declaration was an insufficient guarantee of peace in the region and that a political solution would have to be reached if a military clash was to be avoided.⁸¹

5. The Geophysical Year and the Washington Conference of 1959

While Argentina, Chile, and Great Britain were entangled in a strategic competition that acquired a dangerous level of confrontation, the International Geophysical Year of 1957–58 (IGY) was being organised. Once Argentina and Chile agreed to participate, they joined in the preparatory work on the Antarctic programme of the IGY. Their presentations reflected their policies towards Antarctica, explicitly linking the scientific with the political and the diplomatic.⁸² Images of national sovereignty, heroism, and undiscovered riches commonly appeared in discussions about the scientific programme and in their communications about national involvement. Besides unveiling the secrets hidden beneath the icy surface of the continent, the scientific work was presented as a contribution affirming national sovereignty, despite the fact that both countries had promised they would not use the IGY as a platform to claim rights to the Antarctic.

At the first IGY Antarctic Conference in 1955, Chile's delegation, supported by Argentina, promoted a declaration that scientific work would not affect territorial rights in Antarctica. They intended to push through a specific resolution that the work of the Conference would not affect the political status quo. However, the resolution was roundly rejected by Georges Laclavère, Secretary of the Commission for the IGY, and the delegations had to be content with a

79 See: Allen to Arg. Foreign Minister, 3 February 1952; Mack to Eden, 9 February 1952; Remorino to Mack, 27 February 1952; Mack to Eden, 3 May 1952; and Mack to Eden, 13 May 1952. FO 463/4. TNA/UK.

80 Howkins *Frozen Empires*.

81 In retrospect, the 1952–53 incidents seem to have necessitated the demilitarisation of the continent in the Antarctic Treaty just six years later.

82 Argentina and Chile joined the IGY efforts only after the general programme of activities had already been decided (Adrian Howkins, 'Reluctant Collaborators: Argentina and Chile in Antarctica during the International Geophysical Year, 1957–58', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 34.4 (2008), p. 605).

resolution that approved Laclavère's opening words to the conference affirming its purely scientific character.⁸³ After the Soviets announced they would join the Antarctic effort, all participants of the Conference made a 'gentlemen's agreement' pledging that any activity undertaken as part of the IGY would not be used to strengthen or deny any pre-existent claims. The idea was taken from Escudero's proposal of a moratorium on the sovereignty dispute in 1948 and would eventually form the basis of the political provision in Article IV of the Antarctic Treaty of 1959. The provision allowed any foreign activity in the disputed sector to be publicly presented as a 'concession' of the country claiming that part of Antarctica as its territory, even if the sovereignty of the latter country had not been recognised.

While the IGY was taking place, the United States approached the other 11 nations participating in the Antarctic scientific programme, requesting them to negotiate an agreement that would preserve Antarctica for peaceful activities and secure the freedom of scientific investigation on the continent. The US was reacting to increasing Soviet involvement in the region, and also to the military conflicts of 1952 and 1953 between the two Latin American countries and the British. After extensive preliminary negotiations in 1958–59, a conference was convened in Washington on 15 October 1959.⁸⁴ During the negotiations, Argentina and Chile were adamant in their respective sovereignty claims and adopted a joint game plan to dominate the negotiations. The unspoken alliance between the two countries became apparent, as each usually endorsed the other's position.⁸⁵ Frequently, the two countries expressed 'reservations' in order to reassert their sovereignty claims.

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83 Rossetti to Minister of Foreign Affairs. 20 July 1955. Fondo Antártica/Vol. 28. AGH/Chl.

84 On the negotiations of the Antarctic treaty see Peter J Beck, 'Preparatory Meetings for the Antarctic Treaty 1958–1959', *Polar Record*, 22.141 (1985): 653–64; Rip Bulkeley, 'The Political Origins of the Antarctic Treaty', *Polar Record*, 46.01 (2010): 9–11; Cardone and Fontana, *Latin-American Contributions*; Klaus Dodds, 'The Great Game in Antarctica: Britain and the 1959 Antarctic Treaty', *Contemporary British History*, 22.1 (2008): 43–66; Robert Hall, 'International Regime Formation and Leadership: The Origins of the Antarctic Treaty' (University of Tasmania, 1994) and 'Casey and the Negotiation of the Antarctic Treaty', in J. Jabour-Green and M. Haward (eds), *The Antarctic: Past, Present and Future: Proceedings of a Conference Celebrating the 40th Anniversary of the Entry into Force of the Antarctic Treaty on 23rd June 1961* (2002), p. 27–33; Steve Heavens, 'Brian Roberts and the Origins of the 1959 Antarctic Treaty', *Polar Record*, 2012, 2016, p. 1–13; Howkins, *Frozen Empires*; Ryan A. Musto, 'Cold Calculations: The United States and the Creation of Antarctica's Atom-Free Zone', *Diplomatic History*, 00.0 (2017); M. J. Peterson, *Managing the Frozen South: The Creation and Evolution of the Antarctic Treaty System* (University of California Press, 1988).

85 On the position of the different countries during negotiations, see the memorandums of the meetings of the working group and of the Conference, available in the collection: Program Records 1951–1959 — Conference on Antarctica (Washington DC, 1959). International Conferences, Commissions and Expositions: RG 0043. National Archives and Records Administration. College Park, Maryland, USA.

In the end, the two countries accepted the political arrangement established by article IV of the Antarctic Treaty and joined the other ten parties of the Conference in signing the Antarctic Treaty on 1 December 1959.⁸⁶ A formal moratorium on the dispute did not mean a renunciation of sovereignty. Both countries were adamant in rejecting any form of internationalisation or the establishment of a permanent authoritative body regarding Antarctica. They resisted the idea of freedom of access and of each nation's own jurisdiction over its nationals but were unsuccessful.

On the other hand, thanks to an Argentine initiative, also supported by Chile and the other Southern Hemisphere countries, a prohibition on nuclear explosions and the disposal of radioactive waste in Antarctica was pushed through, citing geographical proximity to the South American continent.⁸⁷ Tying Antarctica to South America allowed both Chile and Argentina to identify with other former British colonies and to legitimise the interests of those countries in closer proximity to the white continent.⁸⁸

The political opposition in both countries chose to interpret the IGY and the Antarctic Treaty as a renunciation of sovereignty claims, so these negotiations encountered strong resistance in their parliaments.⁸⁹ However, the proponents successfully framed their arguments by stressing the positive aspects of these agreements, such as the ban on nuclear testing, and by insisting that they were not giving up national sovereignty and that no new claims would be made—particularly by the US.⁹⁰ Over time, continuous participation in decision-making regarding the Antarctic became a way of asserting national sovereignty. And so it continues to the present.⁹¹

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86 The Antarctic Treaty of 1959 was signed by Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Chile, France, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, the Union of South Africa, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, The United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

87 Although they differed with regard to the extent of the prohibition, all Southern Hemisphere countries present at the Conference (Argentina, Australia, Chile, New Zealand, and the Union of South Africa) supported some form of limitation to nuclear testing and radioactive waste disposal.

88 For a thorough account of the position of Argentina and Chile in the Antarctic Treaty negotiations see Cardone and Fontana, *Latin-American Contributions*.

89 Howkins, *Frozen Empires*.

90 The first two were warranted by Article IV of the Treaty.

91 Although the amount of content related to Antarctica in the educational curriculum has declined (in comparison to the period when Peron was in power), all maps edited in Argentina and Chile are still required to include the Antarctic sector and the insular territories (Natalia Gisele Arce and Tamara Sandra Culleton, 'El Desafío de Crear un Puente Bicontinental: Problemas y Perspectivas en la Enseñanza de la Historia Antártica Argentina', *Revista Estudios Hemisféricos y Polares*, 9.4 (2018): 19–27. Moreover, since 2010, the inclusion of a bi-continental map—a map including the national territory and the claimed Antarctic territory at the same scale—was made mandatory for all school textbooks (Law 26.651 of 15 November 2010).

6. Conclusion: Argentine and Chilean Antarctic territoriality—strategic communications and their long-term consequences

As we have seen, Argentina and Chile have constructed their policies regarding Antarctic territoriality through strategic communications—by diplomatic interchanges framed in accordance with national strategic goals; by the use of symbolism in their Antarctic activities; by developing the concept of an American Antarctica; and by introducing a policy of domestic indoctrination in the principles on which they based their claims to Antarctic territory, including a central policy regarding the production and use of maps.

While for Argentina and Chile their material involvement with Antarctica was a way of demonstrating their link with the continent, the communicative aspects of all related policies were addressed in consideration of their strategic importance, both domestically and internationally. At first, Antarctic policy was not developed as the outcome of a planned programme, but later on, when specific institutions were constituted to deal with the Antarctic question, it acquired a more premeditated strategic character. Both countries addressed the issue of Antarctica as a question of territoriality linked to national identity.

Although developments after the Treaty of 1959 exceed the scope of this paper, I will attempt to briefly summarise, as a final note, outcomes for both countries. The permanence of the achievements described above⁹² seems to signal the success of strategic communications at the domestic level, at least with regard to the original objectives of the two countries. Creating a ‘national Antarctic consciousness’ was a strategic move in an environment in which territorial competition was at its peak. However, Argentine and Chilean territorial views regarding Antarctica have seldom achieved recognition internationally—and the two countries have granted each other little mutual recognition—but the creation of an Antarctic regime has considerably changed the conditions in which such policies were originally generated.⁹³

The success of both countries’ policies in presenting the case of Antarctica as a question of national integrity and identity to their respective populations

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92 Today, the framing of Antarctic issues in Argentina and Chile does not differ much from the years before the signature of the Antarctic Treaty: i) scientific research is usually seen as a means to discover hidden wealth and as a signal for reaffirming national sovereignty; ii) participation in the Antarctic international regime is considered essential to guaranteeing those rights be preserved internationally; iii) all maps published in the country must include the claimed Antarctic sector as national territory; and iv) the educational curriculum includes teaching content related to Antarctica from a general but also a nationalist perspective

93 This is not exclusive to Argentina and Chile. Other claimant countries—and even non-claimant—have eventually portrayed their Antarctic policies in a similar manner.

has created conditions under which the very possibility of changing that interpretation becomes problematic. Effective strategic communications can shape a situation in which the introduction of change is hampered.

The ‘territorial trap’, described by Agnew as the assumption made by International Relations scholars about the essentially territorial character of the nation-state, could also constitute a trap for governments when they define their strategy over their territorial identity, only to experience a considerable change in the general setting.⁹⁴ In any situation in which territory is undefined, such as in Antarctica, tying national identity to territorial claims can be flaunted as a sign of strong conviction, but also can limit options in the long run. Resorting to similar arguments in other contexts can produce similar outcomes. Thus, any strategic communications effort should consider what can be expected as a durable outcome and should be open to change as the situation demands.

To be successful, strategic communications programmes need to consider not only the immediate stakeholders—such as, in our case, domestic publics—but also other concerned actors. Particularly in contexts of conflict—when strategic communications is most needed—a good strategy would not restrict the options available if the strategy is effective, but rather try to associate their interests with values acceptable to the other parties involved. While territorial nationalistic values may be effective in generating a consensus domestically and showing a strong position externally, they could limit available options if the situation leads to a non-zero-sum game. In brief, to be successful, a strategic communications effort should be rooted in shared values and principles among all interested parties. The principles of territoriality are domestically unifying but often constitute a field of international contention. Resorting to cosmopolitan values could produce more desirable results for questions requiring international understanding and cooperation. In our case, the values of collaboration, scientific research, and peaceful use offer a better foundation for current communications about Antarctica.

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⁹⁴ Agnew, *The Territorial Trap*, pp.56-60.

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DISINFORMATION'S SOCIETAL IMPACT: BRITAIN, COVID, AND BEYOND

Thomas Colley, Francesca Granelli
and Jente Althuis

Abstract

Disinformation is widely perceived as a profound threat to democracies. The result is an explosion of research on disinformation's spread and the countermeasures taken against it. Most research has focused on false content spread online. Yet little research has demonstrated the societal impact of disinformation on areas such as trust and social cohesion. Policy responses are mainly based on disinformation's *presumed* impact rather than on its *actual* impact.

This paper advances disinformation research by asking how we can assess its impact more productively, and how research could better inform policy responses to disinformation. It uses examples from Britain between the 2016 'Brexit' referendum campaign and the 2019 General Election, including some preliminary commentary on disinformation during the initial months of the COVID-19 outbreak. First it considers the limitations of existing disinformation research, and how it could address impact more effectively. It then considers how policy responses have been self-limiting by framing the solution as simply reducing the general amount of disinformation online and/or 'inoculating' citizens. Instead we argue for an event or issue-specific focus. This culturally-specific, sociological approach considers different forms of disinformation, the hybrid media systems through which they spread, and the complex offline and online social networks through which impact may occur.

Keywords—*disinformation, trust, social cohesion, UK, election, Brexit, strategic communication, strategic communications, Britain, COVID-19, coronavirus*

About the Authors

Dr Thomas Colley is a Teaching Fellow in War Studies at King's College London and a Fellow of the King's Centre for Strategic Communications. His research examines propaganda, strategic communications and war.

Francesca Granelli is a Teaching Fellow for the Strategic Communications MA at King's College London, where her research focuses on trust. Her latest book is *Trust, Politics and Revolution: A European History*.

Jente Althuis is a PhD candidate at the King's Centre for Strategic Communications, in the Department of War Studies at King's College London. She specialises in the strategic communications of space and urban conflict.

Introduction

Disinformation is perceived by many as one of the greatest threats to liberal democracies today. Hostile actors attempt to use it to undermine governments by shaping voting behaviour, propagating conspiracy theories, radicalising Salafi-jihadists, and inciting ethnic cleansing.¹ Commentators implicate it in the rise of populism, the election of Donald Trump, the rejection of climate science and of vaccination.² In the UK, commentators blame disinformation for Brexit and the 2019 general election.³ The ongoing COVID-19 outbreak has seen a slew of disinformation, from what caused the outbreak to a range of speculative cures. The most controversial in the UK has been a conspiracy that 5G masts are spreading the virus, leading to over fifty being damaged in

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1 House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 'Disinformation and "Fake News": Final Report', Eighth Report of Session 2017–19, HC1791, 14 February 2019. [Accessed 18 February 2019]; Paul Mozur, 'A Genocide Incited on Facebook, With Posts From Myanmar's Military', *New York Times*, 15 October 2018. [Accessed 13 February 2019]

2 H. Allcott and M. Gentzkow, 'Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election', *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 31, No 2 (2017): 211–36; Matt Burgess, 'Here's the First Evidence Russia Used Twitter to Influence Brexit', 10 November, *Wired*, 10 November 2017. [Accessed 18 December 2019]; Sander Van der Linden et al., 'Inoculating the Public against Misinformation about Climate Change', *Global Challenges*, 1, No 2 (2017). [Accessed 18 December 2019]

3 Carole Cadwalladr, 'The Great British Brexit Robbery: How Our Democracy Was Hijacked', *The Guardian*, 7 May 2019. [Accessed 15 December 2019]; Andrew Grice, 'Fake News Handed Brexiters the Referendum—And Now They Have no Idea What They're Doing', *Independent*, 18 January 2017. [Accessed 15 February 2019]; Alex Hern (b), 'How the Tories Won the Online Election: Pick a Line, Ignore the Facts and Repeat', *The Guardian*, 14 December 2019. [Accessed 15 December 2019]

April 2020.⁴

Different actors are blamed for disinformation in different contexts. Digital media is prominent. Culprits include private companies such as Cambridge Analytica, platforms such as 4Chan, Russian hackers, white supremacists, social media echo chambers, political leaders and their parties.⁵ The recording of Donald Trump's 10,000th false or misleading utterance in under two and a half years in office suggests a world order in which disinformation and division are becoming more routine.⁶

Responding to an apparent 'moral panic' about 'fake news',⁷ extensive research has examined disinformation's spread online. Studies illustrate that the internet can dramatically increase the 'quantity, reach and speed' of disinformation's spread through memes, bots, sock puppets, trolls, websites, and filtering algorithms.⁸ Researchers have identified demographic variables that may explain tendencies to spread disinformation, but there is little consensus.⁹ Several correlate low education and belief in disinformation;¹⁰ others suggest higher levels of education make it easier to construct arguments favouring one's existing beliefs.¹¹ Young social media users are often considered most likely to spread and believe disinformation;¹² others find older generations are more susceptible.¹³ Psychologists have used many cognitive biases to explain belief in disinformation—confirmation bias, motivated reasoning, primacy effects, the illusory truth effect, and more.¹⁴

4 Nic Fildes et al., 'How a 5G Coronavirus Conspiracy Spread Across Europe', *Financial Times*, 16 April 2020.

5 For thorough reviews, see Y. Benkler, R. Faris, and H. Roberts, *Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation and Radicalization in American Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Joshua Tucker et al., *Social Media, Political Polarization and Political Disinformation: A Review of the Scientific Literature*, Hewlett Foundation, 19 March 2018. [Accessed 15 November 2019]; Samuel Woolley, and Philip N. Howard (eds), *Computational Propaganda: Political Parties, Politicians, and Political Manipulation on Social Media* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

6 Glenn Kessler et al., 'President Trump Has Made More Than 10,000 False or Misleading Claims', *Washington Post*, 29 April 2019. [Accessed 1 December 2019]

7 Matt Carlson, 'Fake News as an Informational Moral Panic: The Symbolic Deviancy of Social Media During the 2016 US Presidential Election', *Information, Communication & Society*, 23, N° 3 (2018): 374–88.

8 Benkler et al., *Network Propaganda*; House of Commons, 'Disinformation'; Woolley and Howard, *Computational Propaganda*.

9 Andrew Guess, Jonathan Nagler and Joshua Tucker, 'Less Than You Think: Prevalence and Predictors of Fake News Dissemination on Facebook', *Science Advances*, 5, N° 1 (2019): 1–9.

10 Gordon Pennycook, Tyrone Cannon and David Rand, 'Prior Exposure Increases Perceived Accuracy of Fake News', *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 147, N° 12 (2018): 1865–80. [Accessed 12 February 2019]

11 D. J. Flynn, Brendan Nyhan, and Jason Reifler, 'The Nature and Origins of Misperceptions: Understanding False and Unsupported Beliefs About Politics', *Political Psychology*, 38, N° S1 (2017): 127–50.

12 Sam Wineburg et al., *Evaluating Information: The Cornerstone of Civic Online Reasoning*, Stanford History Education Group, (2016). [Accessed 15 January 2020]

13 Guess et al., 'Less Than You Think'.

14 Annenberg School for Communication, 'Understanding and Addressing the Disinformation Ecosystem', Workshop Paper, 15–16 December 2017. [Accessed 24 November 2019]; Christopher Paul, and Miriam Matthews, 'The Russian Firehose of Falsehood' Propaganda Model: Why it Might Work and Options to Counter It', The RAND Corporation, 2016. [Accessed 15 January 2020]

Most studies and policy responses frame disinformation as an online problem requiring online solutions, including improved fact checking, more robust filtering algorithms, and internet regulation.¹⁵ Yet little research studies disinformation's actual societal impact. Disinformation is thought to exert societal effect by damaging trust between citizens and government, or social cohesion by exacerbating division.¹⁶ Whether it is really doing so remains unclear. Policy responses mainly reflect the impact disinformation is *assumed* to be having rather than proven impact it is *actually* having.

This paper therefore asks two related questions: How we can assess disinformation's impact more productively? And how can research better inform efforts to counter disinformation?

We examine these issues through a critical analysis of policy responses to disinformation and the academic literature that informs them. To illustrate our argument we draw on examples from British politics between the 2016 Brexit referendum and today—as well as examples from elsewhere where it is useful to do so. As with any state, the UK's communication environment is unique. We are examining it not because we want to generalise that other contexts are the same. Rather, we are using it because it is an ideal case to illustrate descriptively the key tensions underpinning research and policy responses to disinformation—between assertion and evidence, external and internal threats, 'traditional' and social media, and between online and offline pathways to impact. Prominent commentary attributes the result of the Brexit referendum, and the 2019 general election, to disinformation shaping voting behaviour.¹⁷ Currently, neither is substantiated empirically. The UK government's *Online Harms White Paper*¹⁸ and its 'Don't Feed the Beast' counter-disinformation campaign¹⁹ suggest being 'careful what you share' because 'things aren't always what they seem *online*' [our emphasis]. The campaign is important, but reveals potential limitations of counter-disinformation policy responses—the tendency to overemphasise the role of *false* content spread by *external* actors on *social* media, and to downplay the spread of *misleading* content by *traditional* media and *domestic* political actors.

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15 For example, see House of Commons, 'Disinformation'.

16 John Watts, *Whose Truth? Sovereignty, Disinformation and Winning the Battle of Trust*, Atlantic Council, 19 September 2018. [Accessed 17 December 2019]

17 Cadwalladr, 'The Great', Grice, 'Fake News', Hern, 'How the Tories'.

18 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, *Online Harms White Paper*, HM Government, 2019. [Accessed 18 December 2019]

19 'Share Checklist: Don't Feed the Beast', HM Government, 2019. [Accessed 20 December 2019]

The article proceeds as follows. First, we conceptualise disinformation and how to think about its impact. We argue for a substantial rethink in how disinformation is conceptualised and studied to enable impact to be assessed more productively. We illustrate how future research on disinformation's impact should look beyond social media and draw more strongly on hybrid media approaches. Rather than focusing only on online spread it should incorporate analysis of offline social networks. A common language is needed to conceptualise disinformation's impact, beyond considering it a 'pathogen' whose effects will be resolved by 'inoculation'. Rather than assuming disinformation undermines trust and social cohesion, we discuss how these can be examined more directly.

Finally, we explain how multidimensional research could better inform counter-disinformation interventions. So far, policy interventions have prioritised reducing the general amount of disinformation online. But since people tend to engage only with information that interests them, we advocate an events- or issues-based approach. This would target disinformation relating to specific issues and the networked communities they affect in a given cultural context.

Definitions and Concepts

Identifying and measuring disinformation's impact requires clear definitions. Most research and policy discourse focuses on disinformation, defined here as false or misleading information spread *intentionally* to deceive.²⁰ This is synonymous with earlier definitions of 'fake news', although the latter is increasingly rejected for being used as an expletive to describe information one disagrees with to shut down debate.²¹

'Misinformation' is defined here as false or misleading information spread *without* the intention to deceive. The same content can be disinformation when intentionally deceptive, and misinformation if spread unwittingly. This makes differentiating disinformation and misinformation difficult. Intent is hard to prove. These terms will be used when discussing explicitly whether false information is spread deliberately (disinformation) or accidentally (misinformation). If this is unclear, disinformation will be used as a master term for stylistic purposes.

20 Allcott and Gentzkow, 'Social Media', p. 213; J. Althuis, and L. Haiden, *Fake News: A Roadmap* (Riga: NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence, 2018), p.19.

21 Althuis and Haiden, *Fake News*.

Understanding Impact

To clarify, our focus is on literature concerning the *impact* of disinformation, rather than disinformation research generally. This is an important delimitation. In most cases disinformation's negative impact is assumed rather than demonstrated. That disinformation is undermining democracy is simply inferred from it being 'out there' in civil society. If one agrees with this, the issue of impact can be avoided, as it is taken for granted by the mere presence of disinformation.

In contrast, our main focus is the subset of disinformation research explicitly examining its impact. Where relevant, we touch on the literature on propaganda and media effects, in which the challenge of determining the effect of communication has long been recognised. Many examples we cite refer to rumours and conspiracy theories, since these are often the focus of disinformation research.²² But our central focus is on recent literature on the impact of disinformation, authored in the age of social media.

Disagreement over what constitutes 'impact' complicates matters. Strategic communications practitioners see impact as changing (or reinforcing) beliefs and behaviours, and many prioritise the latter.²³ Voting behaviour is of obvious concern for liberal democracies—either not voting due to disengagement, or voting for figures keen to undermine democratic checks and balances. Political violence, of course, is also a clear concern.

We contend that the impact of disinformation can be split into the following areas:

- Spread (superficial online/offline behaviour towards dis/misinformation)
- Attitude change or reinforcement (e.g. the psychological effects of dis/misinformation on beliefs, cognition)
- Behaviour change (e.g. altering voting behaviour, disengagement from politics)
- Broader societal impact (e.g. reducing institutional trust, undermining social cohesion)

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²² Santanu Chakrabarti et al., *Duty, Identity, Credibility: Fake News and the Ordinary Citizen in Kenya and Nigeria—A Comparative Study*, BBC News independent study, 2018. [Accessed 14 December 2019]; A. Perera, 'Who Can Stop India WhatsApp Lynchings?', BBC, 5 July 2018. [Accessed 3 February 2019]

²³ A. Mackay, and Steve Tatham, *Behavioural Conflict: Why Understanding People and Their Motivations Will Prove Decisive in Future Conflict* (Saffron Walden: Military Studies Press, 2011).

This list reveals a tension inherent in disinformation research. Farther down the list, the impacts are of broader societal significance and potentially of greater policy interest. However, they are hardest to demonstrate. For example, psychologists have identified numerous cognitive biases to explain belief in disinformation.²⁴ These have been comprehensively reviewed elsewhere.²⁵ Because of this we know, in theory, plenty about how disinformation may shape beliefs. Outside the research laboratory, though, the complexity of the communication environment makes it hard to determine whether disinformation is shaping beliefs more than all the other information humans experience every day.

Due to the difficulty measuring ‘real world’ impact, much disinformation research has approached impact in terms of *spread*. This is appealing as a readily measurable behaviour—clicks, retweets, site visits etc. It is a superficial form of impact, though, and of limited use when considering the broader societal effects of disinformation.

Governments are routinely preoccupied with staying in power. However, a greater concern liberal democracies have about disinformation is that it might subvert the democratic system generally. Theoretically, in a healthy democracy, citizens engage in open, civil and rational debate. This facilitates reasoned consensus around responses to societal challenges.²⁶ Theoretically, democracy ‘relies on an informed electorate’.²⁷ Without it, it is harder for citizens to ‘infer the true state of the world’ or to know which sources to trust.²⁸ The ultimate fear is that they might elect undemocratic leaders who then subvert democratic checks and balances.

Due to the difficulties of showing that disinformation specifically has caused such outcomes, few have attempted to do so. It is understandably easier to focus on disinformation’s *spread* and assume that by existing it is undermining democracy. For instance, observers of Russian disinformation have focused on its apparent aim of causing citizens to disengage from democratic politics by presenting so many different interpretations of events that they come to distrust all information sources.²⁹ Evidence of Russia *spreading* such

24 Paul and Matthews, ‘The Russian’.

25 Annenberg School for Communication, ‘Understanding and Addressing’.

26 L. Jacobs et al., *Talking Together: Public Deliberation and Political Participation in America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

27 Pennycook et al., ‘Prior Exposure’.

28 Allcott and Gentzkow, ‘Social Media’.

29 G. Ramsey, and S. Robertshaw, ‘Weaponising news: RT, Sputnik and targeted disinformation’, The Policy Institute: Centre for the study of Media, Communication and Power, King’s College London, 2019. [Accessed 3 February 2019]

information is extensive over the short and long term.³⁰ But causally linking measurable indicators of political disengagement to Russian disinformation is far more difficult. In the UK at least, political engagement—including voting percentages—has steadily increased throughout the twenty-first century, despite the increased prominence of disinformation campaigns.³¹

Policy interventions prioritise spread too. Recommendations mainly concern regulating platforms used to spread disinformation.³² This may be positive, but is mostly based on the impact disinformation spread *might* be having on society rather than proven impacts it is *actually* having.

Research on disinformation's impact

Research on the impact of disinformation's *spread* is mainly focused on electoral outcomes. The 2016 US presidential election dominates. A BuzzFeed report showed how the twenty top-performing false election stories achieved more online engagement than the twenty top-performing true articles.³³ Later, a large Twitter study found that falsehoods spread faster and wider.³⁴ Follow-up polling based on six false headlines showed that 75% of US citizens familiar with them found them 'somewhat' or 'very accurate'.³⁵

Later studies reveal nuances. Allcott and Gentzkow, studying 156 'fake news' articles circulated during the 2016 election, estimated that the typical US adult remembered only 1.14 'fake news' stories during the campaign.³⁶ With public recall so limited, the authors concluded that disinformation's electoral impact was minimal—'hundredths of a percentage point'.³⁷ Guess et al. concur, finding on Facebook that over 90% of citizens shared nothing from a 'fake news website'. They concluded that it is 'important to be clear about how rare this behaviour is'.³⁸

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³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Elise Uberoi, and Neil Johnston, 'Political disengagement in the UK: who is disengaged? House of Commons Library, Briefing Paper CBP-7501, 16 October 2019.

³² House of Commons, 'Disinformation'.

³³ Craig Silverman, 'This Analysis Shows How Viral Fake Election News Stories Outperformed Real News On Facebook', *BuzzFeed News*, 16 November 2016. [Accessed 17 December 2018]

³⁴ Soroush Vosoughi, Deb Roy, and Sinan Aral, 'The Spread of True and False News Online', *Science*, 359, N° 6380 (2018): 1146–51.

³⁵ Craig Silverman, and Jeremy Singer-Vine, 'Most Americans Who See Fake News Believe It, New Survey Says', *BuzzFeed News*, 6 December 2016. [Accessed 12 December 2019]

³⁶ Allcott and Gentzkow, 'Social Media', p. 213.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 232.

³⁸ Guess et al., 'Less Than You Think', p. 1.

Disinformation's electoral impact may be unclear, but some examples show disinformation impacting beliefs and behaviours. Stock market manipulation provides one example. In 2013, a tweet by the Associated Press (AP), falsely reporting explosions in the White House, resulted in a \$130 billion drop in stock value.³⁹ In 2015, a Scottish trader was charged for deliberately spreading disinformation regarding two companies to profit from stock rebounds, costing shareholders over £1m.⁴⁰ Voting decisions may be shaped over years of deliberation, and can involve multiple trade-offs. Stock buying and selling decisions are arguably simpler, happen quickly, and are highly sensitive to perception shifts. With a readily available metric to quantify behavioural impact, disinformation's impact in this context is easier to assess.

Disinformation has also been credited with incidents of 'mob justice' and revenge killings in India and Nigeria.⁴¹ In 2018, the spread of false rumours on WhatsApp in India was credited with causing the self-administered justice and killing of at least 17 people.⁴² In Nigeria, police report that 'fake news' spread across Facebook has caused over a dozen killings.⁴³

Increased vaccine rejection is one of the few cases indicating stronger evidence of disinformation's behavioural impact. Still, the evidence is strongly circumstantial rather than causal. Measles outbreaks are increasing rapidly worldwide, which authors attribute to discredited research combined with populist conspiracy theories.⁴⁴

Given the scientific consensus favouring vaccination, and the scarcity of official calls to reject it (until recently), vaccine hesitancy is often used to reinforce claims that social media is the key variable. This obscures greater complexity. That over three times as many French citizens (41%) distrust vaccines as the rest of the world (13%) is difficult to attribute to the short-term impact of social media disinformation.⁴⁵ Researchers must identify the longer-term factors at play.

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39 Kenneth Rapoza, 'Can "Fake News" Impact the Stock Market?', *Forbes*, 26 February 2017. [Accessed 3 February 2019]

40 David Connett, 'Scottish Stock Market Trader "Cost Shareholders £1m with Fake Tweets"', *Independent*, 6 November 2015. [Accessed 18 December 2019]

41 Chakrabarti, et al., *Duty, Identity*.

42 Perera, 'Who Can Stop'.

43 Yemisi Adegoke, et al., 'Like. Share. Kill. Nigerian police say 'fake news' on Facebook is killing people', *BBC News*, 13 November 2018. [Accessed 4 January 2020]

44 Jacqueline Olive, et al., 'The State of the Antivaccine Movement in the United States: A Focused Examination of Nonmedical Exemptions in states and Counties', *PLOS Medicine* 15, N° 6 (2018).

45 H. Larson, et al., 'The State of Vaccine Confidence 2016: Global Insights Through a 67-Country Survey', *EBioMedicine*, 12 (2016): 295–301.

Crisis situations, such as the aftermath of terrorist attacks, have been shown to create environments ripe for misleading rumours and speculation. A high-profile case concerns the March 2017 Westminster Bridge terrorist attack. An image spread of a hijab-wearing Muslim woman walking across Westminster Bridge with a look of apparent indifference to the attack. The account that first tweeted it (@SouthLoneStar) was later traced to the Internet Research Agency in Russia. It was then shared extensively by far-right and Islamophobic social media influencers. This resulted in a significant backlash online against Muslim groups, despite the original photographer releasing the original sequence of photographs to show that the single image was unrepresentative.⁴⁶ Again, this demonstrates measurable impact on online behaviour, though whether this changed or merely reinforced existing views is unclear.

Behavioural impact appears easier to identify in health crises, since dis/misinformation is more easily linked to concrete behaviours, such as the decision to vaccinate, or to take or reject medication. *Operation Infektion* is one of the most prominent historical cases of disinformation, in which the Soviet Union successfully propagated in the 1980s the falsehood that AIDS was created in a US government laboratory. That, by 2012, studies report that between one third and one half of US African Americans still believed this illustrates the clear impact of disinformation on beliefs.⁴⁷ Of greater impact on behaviour is misinformation by governments, such as the Thabo Mbeki regime in South Africa, which denied the link between HIV and AIDS. Critics blame this for hundreds of thousands of preventable, early deaths, as citizens rejected anti-retroviral medication that may have mitigated the condition.⁴⁸

The COVID-19 outbreak reinforces the notion that it may be more possible to see concrete offline behavioural impacts of disinformation in crisis situations, as uncertainty and fear are heightened.⁴⁹ In the UK, in April 2020, dozens of 5G phone masts were vandalised or destroyed by citizens apparently concerned that they were being used to spread coronavirus.⁵⁰ The claim has been swiftly and repeatedly

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46 Burgess, 'Here's the First'.

47 N. Nattrass, 'Understanding the Origins and Prevalence of AIDS Conspiracy Beliefs in the United States and South Africa', *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 35, N° 1 (2013): 113–29.

48 S. Boseley, 'Mbeki Aids denial 'caused 300,000 deaths'', *The Guardian*, 26 November 2008. [Accessed 19 May 2020]

49 Roy Schulman, and David Siman-Tov, 'From Biological Weapons to Miracle Drugs: Fake News about the Coronavirus Pandemic', Institute for National Security Studies, Insight 1275, 18 March 2020. [Accessed 24 April 2020]

50 Carly Page, 'UK Mobile Networks Slam 'Baseless' 5G Conspiracy Theories Behind Mast Fires', *Forbes*, 2020. [Accessed 24 April 2020]

debunked,⁵¹ and is countered by decades of evidence of how viruses—including coronaviruses—actually spread. Nevertheless, the fact that belief in this potential threat was sufficient to motivate people to commit criminal damage appears to be strong causal evidence of disinformation having measurable offline behavioural impact. Cases of individuals poisoning themselves by attempting cures with no medical evidence provide similar corroboration of the impact of misinformation on behaviour in disease outbreaks.⁵² In the UK for instance, misinformation that the everyday painkiller Ibuprofen should not be taken to treat COVID-19 led to widespread shortages of an alternative drug, Paracetamol. The research team reporting on this emphasise the significance of the case because, as rarely occurs in disinformation research, ‘direct behavioural effect’ could be proven.⁵³

Psychology research supports the assertion that the impact of disinformation is more likely to be seen in health scares, whereby heightened panic, and the absence of evidence-based cures, leads people to culture-specific, traditional remedies. Or alternatively, people medicate themselves based on rumours about what works. Certainly such phenomena should not be seen as novel—the WHO itself acknowledged that misinformation during epidemics existed ‘even during the Middle Ages’. Neither should social media be seen as a cause—humans have for millennia retained belief in traditional cures without robust empirical evidence, long before social media emerged. Research shows that anger makes people more likely to believe dis/misinformation that confirms their existing beliefs.⁵⁴ Research shows that stress makes it harder to engage in deliberative rather than automatic reasoning.⁵⁵ It also shows that rumours are more likely to spread when there is inadequate reliable information and high social anxiety.⁵⁶ This suggests that emotionally charged situations, such as the fear and frustration engendered by the COVID-19 pandemic, are more likely to see the behavioural impact of disinformation. Disinformation’s broader, long-term impact on societies may be more important to liberal democracies in general, but it is far harder to determine.

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51 Kate Lewis, ‘5G is Not Accelerating the Spread of the New Coronavirus’, *FullFact*, 31 March 2020. [Accessed 24 April 2020]

52 Neil Vigdor, ‘Man Fatally Poisons Himself While Self-Medicating for Coronavirus, Doctor Says’, *New York Times*, 24 March 2020.

53 Crime and Security Research Institute, ‘Rumours About the Efficacy of Ibuprofen vs Paracetamol in Treating COVID-19 Symptoms: The Making of a Misinformation ‘Soft Fact’ With Public Health Impact’, Cardiff University, 2020. [Accessed 18 May 2020]

54 Brian E. Weeks, ‘Emotions, Partisanship, and Misperceptions: How Anger and Anxiety Moderate the Effect of Partisan Bias on Susceptibility to Political Misinformation’, *Journal of Communication*, 65, N° 4 (2015): 699–719.

55 Haroro Ingram, ‘Pandemic Propaganda and the Global Democracy Crisis’. [Accessed 18 May 2020]

56 J. Heller, ‘Rumors and Realities: Making Sense of HIV/AIDS Conspiracy Narratives and Contemporary Legends’, *American Journal of Public Health*, 105 (2015): 43–50.

Changing Assumptions: Rethinking disinformation research

To begin to assess the societal impact of disinformation, we argue for a rethink of how disinformation is conceptualised, studied, and responded to by policymakers. We advocate five ways to extend disinformation research and policy responses. Some are novel; others call for extensions to existing trends:

1. Look beyond the spread of disinformation online and especially beyond social media.
2. Examine forms of disinformation other than false content more systematically.
3. Study disinformation's impact in a broader range of cultural contexts.
4. Re-examine language used to describe disinformation and its impact.
5. Examine disinformation's impact on trust and social cohesion multidimensionally.

The rest of the paper elaborates on these. It then ties these threads together by illustrating a multidimensional, issue-focused approach to studying disinformation's impact.

1. Look beyond the spread of disinformation online and especially beyond social media

Disinformation is not just an online or social media issue. This may seem obvious. However, the offline spread and impact of disinformation is something most disinformation research raises as a caveat rather than being factored into research design. Many specifically define disinformation as an online phenomenon, reflecting the original focus on so-called 'fake news websites'.⁵⁷ Policy interventions, too, suggest disinformation is one of many 'online harms' to be mitigated.⁵⁸

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⁵⁷ European Commission, *A Multi-dimensional Approach to Disinformation: Report of the Independent High Level Group on Fake News and Online Disinformation* (Luxembourg: Publications Office in the European Union, 2018). [Accessed 2 December 2019]
⁵⁸ DCMS, *Online Harms*.

Our contention is that the ‘online’ qualifier would be best removed from this call to action, to gain a fuller perspective on disinformation’s societal impact. We are not arguing that studying online behaviour is not useful. Rather, we advocate going beyond existing approaches to incorporate more diverse news-sharing behaviours, including offline.

Policy responses to counter disinformation need to catch up with a growing literature on how disinformation spreads across hybrid media systems incorporating both social and traditional media.⁵⁹ UK responses to date focus primarily on social media, while silencing the role of traditional media. The UK’s *Online Harms White Paper* exemplifies this in its description of ‘The Problem’ democracies face with disinformation:

There is a real danger that hostile actors use online disinformation to undermine our democratic values and principles. Social media platforms use algorithms which can lead to ‘echo chambers’ or ‘filter bubbles’, where a user is presented with only one type of content instead of seeing a range of voices and opinions. This can promote disinformation by ensuring that users do not see rebuttals or other sources that may disagree and can also mean that users perceive a story to be far more widely believed than it really is.⁶⁰

The most striking reasons to move far beyond social media when studying and intervening to counter disinformation is that in many countries, few individuals share news on social media, fewer still trust it, and this trust is declining.⁶¹ Citizens globally express concern that the internet, and social media in particular, are platforms through which disinformation spreads. Consequently, they trust social media news less. In 2018, in response to a poll conducted by Reuters, 51% of citizens reported that they trust the media they use most of the time, 44% trust news media in general, but only 23% trust social media news. In the UK, only 22% of respondents reported sharing news online, only 12% trust social media news, and this percentage is declining.⁶² This suggests that if one’s concern is

59 Andrew Chadwick, *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Andrew Chadwick, Cristian Vaccari, and Ben O’Loughlin, ‘Do Tabloids Poison the Well of Social Media?’, *New Media & Society*, 20, N° 11 (2018): 4255–74.

60 DCMS, *Online Harms*, p. 5.

61 N. Newman et al., *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2018* (Reuters Institute and the University of Oxford, 2018). [Accessed 12 December 2019]

62 Ibid.

disinformation spread on social media, one's focus is immediately narrowed to a subgroup of the population. The spread of disinformation offline receives minimal attention.

Policy responses focusing only on social media neglect the significance of traditional media and offline communication networks. The power and spread of social media content is inextricably tied to traditional media. The two should not be considered in isolation, even if this makes research more complex. Studies show that over a third of Twitter content references traditional media content.⁶³ Content that goes 'viral' on social media typically requires amplification by traditional media.⁶⁴

Recognising this, a growing number of studies have adopted hybrid approaches. These recognise the interdependence of social media and 'traditional' media, and the complex interrelationships through which political elites, news producers, and citizens communicate.⁶⁵ The multidimensional methods such studies adopt are better placed to examine the societal impact of disinformation. For Benkler et al., it was the interaction of television, radio, independent websites, and social media within a US 'right wing media ecosystem', that best explains the election of Donald Trump.⁶⁶ Jamieson claims that Russian 'cyberwar' activities were the significant factor, but blames a complex combination of the press, social media, the presidential candidates, and partisans on both sides for amplifying Russian efforts.⁶⁷

That the spread of misinformation involves the complex interaction of multiple actors is also shown in the UK study of how Ibuprofen came to be seen as a dangerous treatment for COVID-19.⁶⁸ The study shows in impressive detail how a combination of social media and traditional media activity, informal rumours and official medical sources, spread incrementally the unsubstantiated claim that Ibuprofen was unsafe. However, the fact that the authors feel the need to name a new category termed 'complex misinformation' to describe this process appears

63 I. Rogstad, 'Is Twitter Just Rehashing? Intermedia Agenda Setting Between Twitter and Mainstream Media', *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 13, N° 2 (2016): 142–58.

64 Ibid.

65 Chadwick, *The Hybrid Media*; Chadwick et al., 'Do Tabloids'; U. Mejias, and N. Vokuev, 'Disinformation and the Media: The Case of Russia and Ukraine', *Media, Culture & Society*, 39, N° 7 (2017): 1027–42.

66 Benkler et al., *Network Propaganda*, p. 384.

67 Kathleen Jamieson, *Cyberwar: How Russian Hackers and Trolls Helped Elect a President – What We Don't, Can't and Do Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

68 Crime and Security Research Institute, 'Rumours'.

symptomatic of how oversimplistic responses to disinformation have been. The spread of mis/disinformation is always complex, because communication flows are complex, especially in the Digital Age. It is our responses to it, usually by fixating on social media, that have been too simplistic.

Moving disinformation research offline is also important, because it is not clear whether online or offline disinformation has a greater effect on political engagement.⁶⁹ In 2018, Reuters found that ‘there is little difference in self-reported exposure to misinformation between those that mainly consume news offline and those that mainly consume news online’.⁷⁰ Focusing only online, because digital networks are the entry points hostile foreign actors use to spread disinformation, is understandable but limits the ability to discover where, how, and why disinformation generates societal impact in terms of trust and social cohesion. As Benkler et al. caution, ‘it is critical not to confound what is easy to measure (Twitter) with what is significantly effective in shaping beliefs’.⁷¹ Policy approaches to counter disinformation would benefit from a more multidimensional approach to addressing the issue. In this respect, the European Commission’s report into disinformation provides a useful way forward in highlighting how political actors, news media, digital media, and citizens can all contribute to disinformation’s impact, and therefore to a solution.⁷²

2. Examine forms of disinformation other than false content more systematically

Most political science research on disinformation’s impact focuses on *false content* rather than on more nuanced forms of disinformation. For quantitative research examining disinformation spread online, a true/false dichotomy is useful for dividing data cleanly, especially when using headlines as the unit of analysis. Such studies are effective in demonstrating how ‘true’ and ‘false’ content spreads differently online,⁷³ although by design they can say little about societal impact. They also underplay the diverse forms of disinformation found in the contemporary media ecology.

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⁶⁹ Tucker et al., *Social Media*.

⁷⁰ Newman et al., *Reuters Institute*, p. 39.

⁷¹ Benkler et al., *Network Propaganda*, p. 384.

⁷² European Commission, *A Multidimensional*.

⁷³ Silverman, ‘This Analysis’.

However, other forms of disruptive information have begun to receive greater attention. This is important, because evidence suggests that many disinformation campaigns are becoming more subtle and harder to detect. Rather than spreading objectively verifiable falsehoods, campaigns are increasingly based on ‘soft facts’ comprised of malleable information whose provenance is uncertain and thus harder to debunk.⁷⁴ Frameworks, such as that produced by the non-profit organisation First Draft, now move beyond false or ‘fabricated’ content to examine other forms of ‘information disorder’ such as satire, false connections, misleading content, false context, imposter content, and manipulated content.⁷⁵ This conceptual broadening is useful. It highlights a far more subtle range of disinformation. It also shows how social media is only a small part of the issue. Many of these have long been common in traditional media. False connection—such as when a headline does not match the content of an article—can deceive individuals, as can, for example, misleading content that uses statistics highly selectively to produce a distorted impression. False context can also mislead, whereby genuine content is used in a different context.⁷⁶ Classic examples have recently been found in anti-immigration media coverage. This typically claims a given country faces excessive immigration, but alludes to this by using images of (typically non-white) immigrants at the borders of other countries.

There have been egregious examples of these different forms of disinformation in British politics in recent elections. During the British general election televised debate on 19 November 2019, the Conservative Party relabelled its official Twitter account to ‘@factcheckUK’.⁷⁷ This is a prime example of ‘impostor’ content: a political party trying to make its counterclaims more credible by making them look like they come from an impartial fact checking service.⁷⁸ Indeed this suggests an evolution in disinformation tactics requiring further research—the fraudulent use of counter-disinformation tactics such as fact-checking services to try and enhance credibility. First Draft also reported that between 1 and 4 December 2019, in the penultimate week of the campaign, 88% of Conservative Party Facebook adverts contained suspect information,

74 Martin Innes, ‘Soft Facts and Digital Behavioural Influencing After the 2017 Terror Attacks’, *CREST Research*, 2020. [Accessed 18 May 2020]

75 Claire Wardle, ‘Fake News: It’s Complicated’, *First Draft*, 16 February 2017. [Accessed 14 December 2019]

76 Ibid.

77 Laurence Dodds, ‘Twitter Accuses Conservatives of “Misleading” Voters by Posing as Fact-checking Account During Election Debate’, *The Telegraph*, 20 November 2019. [Accessed 17 December 2019]

78 Wardle, ‘Fake News’.

compared to 6.7% by the Labour Party.⁷⁹ These were mostly misleading rather than false, mainly concerning flawed statistical calculations of manifesto promises.

A further reason for more research to consider multiple forms of disinformation is that false content is not the main form of disinformation citizens perceive. As Ipsos MORI have shown globally, citizens' estimations of immigration or spending levels are often wildly inaccurate.⁸⁰ When asked why, citizens answer that politicians mislead people (52%), the media misleads people (49%), or social media misleads people (41%). This reveals a disparity:

While politicians and the media often talk about 'fake news' in terms of Russian propaganda or for-profit fabrication by Macedonian teenagers, it is clear that audience concerns are very different, relating to different kinds of deception largely perpetrated by journalists, politicians, and advertisers.⁸¹

Just because citizens see disinformation differently from academics or policymakers does not mean these are the areas where disinformation has greatest behavioural impact. Nevertheless, if misleading content from traditional sources is having far greater impact on public perceptions, it shows the potential limitations of social-media-based policy responses.

Overall, the growing focus on identifying different forms of disinformation is welcome. It would be helpful to extend this to consider systematically how the *impact* of disinformation might vary depending on the form it takes.

British Electoral Disinformation in a Multidimensional Perspective

Considering traditional as well as social media, and multiple forms of disinformation apart from false content, provides a stronger foundation to assess disinformation's impact and construct policy countermeasures. Focusing on any of these in isolation will miss key sources of impact. It risks fixation on the apparent novelty of short-term falsehoods spread on social media, when significant impact may require the interaction of these activities with longer-

79 Alastair Reid, and Carlotta Dotto, 'Thousands of Misleading Conservative Ads Side-step Scrutiny Thanks to Facebook Policy', *First Draft News*, 6 December 2019. [Accessed 17 December 2019]

80 Ipsos MORI, 'Fake News, Filter Bubbles and Post-Truth are Other People's Problems', 6 September 2018. [Accessed 13 February 2019]

81 Newman et al., *Reuters Institute*, p. 20.

term misleading information within traditional media, and offline interactions within societies.

The importance of considering these together can be seen in British election campaigns in recent years, but also in some UK citizens' responses to the COVID-19 outbreak. First, the Brexit referendum illustrates the benefits of moving beyond false content to study multiple forms of disinformation. British citizens replicate global findings in being just as concerned about misleading content, 'when facts are spun or twisted to push a particular agenda' (59%) and poor journalism, including factual mistakes, misleading headlines, and clickbait (55%), as they are by false stories (58%).⁸² However, they report coming across misleading content or 'spun' content far more often (42%) than false content (15%).⁸³ This suggests that British citizens diagnose 'the problem' of disinformation very differently from the government's *Online Harms White Paper*.⁸⁴ Citizens do not see disinformation's spread on social media as the main issue. They see misleading information as a routine part of everyday politics among politicians and traditional media.

Other research corroborates citizens' perceptions that misleading (rather than false) content was the more prominent form of disinformation in the Brexit referendum campaign. As Busby et al. describe, 'unlike the US election, the most misleading content didn't come from newly created websites or automated accounts'.⁸⁵ Instead, disinformation came from 'misleading headlines, graphics and statistics from the mainstream press, political parties and hyper-partisan websites'.⁸⁶

Similar dynamics characterised the 2019 General Election. Marchal et al. found that only 2% of Twitter links shared during their campaign sampling period came from what they described as 'junk news' sites that 'deliberately publish misleading, deceptive or incorrect information purporting to be real news'.⁸⁷ Only 0.1% was identified as Russian 'propaganda'. In contrast, 57% of

82 Ibid.

83 Ibid., p. 20.

84 DCMS, *Online Harms*.

85 Mattha Busby et al., 'Types of Misinformation During the UK Election', *First Draft*, 23 June 2017. [Accessed 3 January 2020]

86 Ibid.

87 N. Marchal et al. (b), *Junk News and Information Sharing During the 2019 UK General Election: Online Supplement to Data Memo 2019.4*, p.2 (Oxford: Oxford Internet Institute, 2019). [Accessed 20 December 2019]

shared content came from professional, established news sites.⁸⁸ The greater prominence of misleading content has been corroborated. Of the ‘junk news’ sample, ‘rather than peddling entirely made-up facts, nearly every story in this sample spun reporting by more established outlets—often distorting or exaggerating the truth—serving ideological agendas in the process’.⁸⁹ This further reinforces Chadwick et al.’s finding that sharing tabloid content was most strongly correlated with spreading dis- or misinformation during the 2017 election.⁹⁰ Marchal et al.’s analysis suggests a two-phase process may be occurring, whereby ‘traditional’ media outlets post misleading content, then ‘junk news’ outlets exaggerate this further.⁹¹ Still, what Marchal et al. describe as ‘junk news’ websites comprise a small fraction of UK news sharing. These examples suggest longer term, systemic issues within the British media ecology that require deeper examination.

COVID Conspiracies

The COVID-19 pandemic, and the British public’s response to it, also highlight the importance of a multi-dimensional approach to disinformation. As mentioned earlier, in March and April 2020, small groups of British citizens began to vandalise and in some cases destroy 5G telecommunications masts, based on the spurious belief that they are being used to spread coronavirus. Superficially, the idea that 5G masts might be spreading a biological pathogen seemed so ridiculous to many that early media and government commentary attributed it to ‘crazed’ and ‘crackpot’ social media activity. The government’s response reflected a similar assumption—to engage with social media companies to get such content removed.⁹²

Criminal damage is obviously unacceptable, and therefore efforts to impede the spread of ideas that encourage it are obviously positive. However, focusing only on social media’s role obscures far greater complexity. The theory actually originated, according to Temperton, on traditional media, in a Belgian television interview in January 2020.⁹³ Only later was this picked up by various anti-5G

88 N. Marchal et al. (a), ‘Junk News and Information Sharing During the 2019 UK General Election’ (Oxford: Oxford Internet Institute, 2019), p.3. [Accessed 20 December 2019]

89 Ibid., p. 5.

90 Chadwick et al., ‘Do Tabloids’.

91 Marchal et al. (a), ‘Junk News’.

92 Mikey Smith, ‘Vandalism of 5G Masts over “Crazed” Coronavirus Theory “Putting Lives at Risk”’, *The Mirror*, 6 April 2020.

93 James Temperton, ‘How the 5G Coronavirus Conspiracy Theory Tore through the Internet’, *Wired*, 6 April 2020. [Accessed 24 April 2020]

Facebook groups, conspiracist website Infowars, and RT (*Russia Today*), where it added to the significant increase in disinformation related to COVID-19 from Russian sources.⁹⁴ The theory itself also had an apparent basis in prior academic research.⁹⁵ A significant catalyst was that influential celebrities promoted the conspiracy, either as deliberate disinformation, or unwitting misinformation. In the UK, morning television presenter Eamonn Holmes was censured for asking for more evidence to debunk the conspiracy, which was interpreted by some as him implying that it might be true.⁹⁶ In other words, the interaction of traditional and social media, academic research and celebrity influencers, domestic and external actors, is responsible for the theory's spread. And while fixating on the social media aspect, the offline interactions that led everyday citizens to decide to risk prosecution to destroy masts are missed—as they often are in disinformation research.

While at face value the 5G conspiracy theory seemed outlandish and 'bizarre' to many commentators, that many British people might believe it is not as implausible as early observers suggested. As Scheufele and Krause summarise, people are more likely to believe information if it 'appears to follow a logical narrative, that comes from a source they perceive to be "credible", that is consistent with their pre-existing values and beliefs, and that seems to be something that other people believe'.⁹⁷ For particular audiences, the 5G conspiracy theory achieves these more easily than many might expect. Seen in isolation, its individual elements do not seem extreme—they merely follow currents in traditional media coverage in the mid- and long term.

The idea that devices emitting radio waves or microwaves can damage health has long been prominent in British society, whether attributed to phone masts, microwaves, and other devices emitting electromagnetic radiation. That they might cause cancer is the typical focus; an idea believed by 35% of British people in 2018.⁹⁸ A cursory Google search reveals dozens of media articles going back at least to the 1980s speculating on these issues. These ideas long pre-exist the

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94 Ibid.

95 Lewis, '5G is Not'.

96 Chris Baynes, 'Eamonn Holmes Fans Flames of 5G Coronavirus Conspiracies By Saying "It Suits State Narrative" for Media to Dismiss Them', *Independent*, 2020. [Accessed 24 April 2020]

97 S. Lewandowsky et al., 'Misinformation and Its Correction: Continued Influence and Successful Debiasing', *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 13 (2012): 106–31; D. A. Scheufele, and N. Krause, 'Science Audiences, Misinformation, and Fake News', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 116, No 16 (2019): 7662–69.

98 L. Shahab et al., 'Prevalence of Beliefs about Actual and Mythical Causes of Cancer and Their Association with Socio-Demographic and Health-Related Characteristics: Findings from a Cross-Sectional Survey in England', *European Journal of Cancer*, 103 (2018): 308–16.

mobile phone, let alone social media.⁹⁹ Trying to remove such content from social media is therefore a partial response, at best.

In parallel, the idea that China represents a security threat is an increasingly prominent frame in British traditional media in recent years.¹⁰⁰ Before COVID-19 this mainly focused on China's role in supplying 5G technology or constructing UK nuclear power plants, with the concern that these could be used for surveillance, or to undermine British critical national infrastructure.¹⁰¹ Ongoing criticism of China's response to COVID-19 is likely to keep the perception of a 'China threat' prominent in the West. The 'China Threat' frame and the 'telecommunication mast harm' frame can even be combined with the idea that the virus's emergence in Wuhan corresponds with the city's 5G rollout, helping some find the narrative even more plausible.

The 5G conspiracy theory is arguably best seen not as a novel manifestation of the online harms caused by social media, but as an old story with a new spin, spreading in unusually febrile circumstances. To this must be added the role of political actors: in this case, recurrent calls by the populist Right in the UK—and, on occasion, elements of the Conservative Party—for citizens to dismiss 'expert' advice. This was encapsulated by Michael Gove's notorious quotation that British people had 'had enough of experts' (even if this only partially represented what Gove said).¹⁰² Gove is one of the senior government figures directing the government's response to COVID-19.

British people are currently experiencing the emotional uncertainty of a global pandemic. Some will have been primed by years of media coverage advocating distrust of government messaging, distrust of academic expertise, and ideas such as phone masts are damaging and the Chinese are a growing threat. None of these seems especially 'crazed' or 'crackpot' on its own. Consequently, the inference that 5G masts are a threat to be destroyed is actually not as outlandish as it might seem. As a narrative, its plot has some temporal and causal coherence, which makes some find it plausible, however criminal the response is.

99 BBC, 'Phone Masts: A Health Risk?' 13 September 2004. [Accessed 24 April 2020]

100 See for example R. Mendick, 'China poses greatest threat to UK as global superpower, claims new study,' Telegraph, 2019. [Accessed 24 April 2020]

101 Thorsten Benner, 'Britain Knows It's Selling Out Its National Security to Huawei, Foreign Policy', *Foreign Policy*, 31 January 2020. [Accessed 24 April 2020]

102 H. Mance, 'Britain Has Had Enough of Experts, Says Gove', *Financial Times*, 2016. [Accessed 24 April 2020]

What this account does not explain is why these beliefs outweigh others people already hold strongly. Understanding this better would enhance future disinformation research. Currently, most disinformation research on a given topic will highlight at some point that the topic is not new. This is logically necessary, since many theories of disinformation assume it is believed because of confirmation bias, whereby people are more likely to accept information that corresponds to what they already believe.¹⁰³ Often research just raises these prior beliefs as a caveat, and then empirical research selects one social media platform (mostly Twitter) and quantifies disinformation spread.

In contrast, relatively little research on disinformation seeks to explain in detail the multiple, contrasting beliefs people hold that are relevant to a given topic, and why one wins through. The person who believes the 5G conspiracy theory probably also believes ordinarily that doctors should be trusted on medical matters. They have likely had dozens of infections, which they ordinarily attribute to conventional medical explanations. Why the conspiracy theory outweighs these long-held views in a given instance requires deeper, qualitative research into individuals' belief systems and information-sharing behaviours.¹⁰⁴ This research needs to be culturally specific. Attitudes towards disinformation, and which sources are trusted and which are not, will vary in different contexts. A multidimensional, longer-term view would greatly inform disinformation research. It would take it far beyond the spread of such content online, and beyond the efforts to compel social media companies to reduce or remove such content.

Overall, the examples here corroborate Benkler et al.'s call to embrace more sophisticated approaches, focusing on the 'structural, not the novel', on 'long-term dynamic[s]', not the 'disruptive technological moment', and on the interaction between media rather than on a single platform or the internet.¹⁰⁵ The more these multiple elements are factored into research designs and policy interventions, the better we will understand the impact of disinformation and how to address it.

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103 R. S. Nickerson, 'Confirmation Bias: A Ubiquitous Phenomenon in Many Guises', *Review of General Psychology* 2, N° 2 (1998): 175–220.

104 For an example of incorporating in depth interviews to explore disinformation-related behaviours further, see Edson C. Tandoc et al., 'Diffusion of Disinformation: How Social Media Users Respond to Fake News and Why', *Journalism*, 21, N° 3 (2020): 381–98.

105 Benkler et al., *Network Propaganda*, p. 384.

3. Study disinformation's impact in a broader range of cultural contexts.

That British citizens perceive misleading information from traditional media and politicians as more prominent than false content on social media illustrates that disinformation's origins and impact are subject to cultural variation. Research into disinformation campaigns in other polities is growing, as tactics perceived to have succeeded in one context are tried elsewhere. The Oxford Internet Institute has identified 70 countries where disinformation campaigns have taken place and that number is increasing.¹⁰⁶

Such studies illustrate well the proliferation of the varied techniques used to *spread* disinformation. What we now need to understand is how cultural variations shape the *impact* disinformation might have on audiences. Research on this is limited but is extremely important.

Western liberal democratic political elites may be concerned about disinformation undermining democratic processes, but publics elsewhere appear less concerned. Citizens in some countries report viewing disinformation very differently. BBC-commissioned research in Kenya and Nigeria has found that attitudes towards disinformation are not uniformly negative. Publics in these countries are extremely concerned about disinformation and misinformation that might incite violence or cause personal or financial harm. However, they deem disinformation spread by politicians far less important, and too abstract to worry about.¹⁰⁷

Levels of trust in social media are far higher in some countries than in others—while in 2019 only 12% of Britons claimed to trust information on social media, 52% claimed to in Saudi Arabia, India, and Thailand.¹⁰⁸ As mentioned earlier, disinformation in the form of false rumours spread on Facebook and WhatsApp have appeared to precipitate revenge killings in India and Nigeria.¹⁰⁹ In northwest Pakistan in April 2019, a polio vaccination centre was burnt down following dis/misinformation that the vaccine was

106 Davey Alba and Sheera Frenkel, 'Russia Tests New Disinformation Tactics in Africa to Expand Influence', *The New York Times*, 30 October 2019. [Accessed 18 December 2019]; Samantha Bradshaw and Phillip Howard, *The Global Disinformation Order: 2019 Global Inventory of Organised Social Media Manipulation*, (Oxford: Oxford Internet Institute, 2019). [Accessed 23 December 2019]

107 Chakrabarti et al., *Duty, Identity*.

108 Alex Hern (a), 'Britons Less Trusting of Social Media Than Other Major Nations', *The Guardian*, 3 May 2019. [Accessed 3 May 2019]

109 Chakrabarti et al., *Duty, Identity*.

causing fainting and vomiting.¹¹⁰ Videos spread on Twitter appeared to contribute to the panic. However, the relative contribution of online and offline communication networks in that cultural context needs to be better understood, since suspicion of polio vaccination has long been widespread in the region.¹¹¹

Cultural variations in how publics ethically evaluate disinformation also require further research. In the BBC study, many Indian respondents reported feeling obliged to spread disinformation for nation-building or regime-bolstering purposes.¹¹² They saw that it could perform a positive societal function to boost the nation in certain circumstances. This contrasts strongly with the implicit Western perspective that spreading disinformation is inherently subversive. Far more research in different contexts is necessary to uncover these variations, including in the UK, where public attitudes to disinformation and those who spread it remain poorly understood.

4. Re-examine language used to describe disinformation and its impact

Policy responses and research into disinformation's societal impact must reconsider the language used to describe it. Recent policy approaches in liberal democracies have tended to begin with disinformation injected into the body politic, often by external actors. It is treated as a biological 'pathogen' to which certain groups are 'vulnerable'. The task becomes to find these 'communities' and to 'inoculate' them through programmes such as improved media literacy. This would make society more 'resilient'. Rushkoff et al. exemplify this metaphorical approach in their discussion of the spread of memes:

Virulent ideas and imagery only take hold if they effectively trigger a cultural immune response, leading to widespread contagion. [...] The urgent question we all face is not how to disengage from the modern social media landscape, but rather how do we immunize ourselves against media viruses, fake news, and propaganda?¹¹³

110 Joe Wallen, '25,000 Children in Pakistan Rushed to Hospital after Spread of False Polio Vaccine Rumours', *The Telegraph*, 23 April 2019. [Accessed 18 December 2019]

111 Ibid.

112 Chakrabarti et al., *Duty, Identity*.

113 D. Rushkoff, D. Pescovitz and J. Dunagan, 'The Biology of Disinformation: Memes, Media Viruses and Cultural Inoculation', Institute for the Future, 2018, p. 3. [Accessed 20 December 2019]

A virus doesn't make us sick unless we lack an immune system capable of recognizing the shell and then neutralizing the code. Until we do that, the virus replicates, and our immune system goes berserk, giving us the fever, chills, congestion, or vomiting—which manifest in culture as media confusion, Twitter wars, protests in the street, sleepless nights, and 'homegrown' terror. None of this is spontaneous or unpredictable. It's all just viral memetics in action.¹¹⁴

The idea that increased critical analysis reduces susceptibility to disinformation is not without merit. Meta-analyses suggest that, despite the limited effectiveness of specific campaigns, improved critical media and digital literacy are likely to improve people's ability to identify disinformation.¹¹⁵ The problem with employing biological metaphors in this context is that if used uncritically they oversimplify how communication works. Metaphorically, biological understandings of disinformation spread bear similarity to discredited, centuries-old, 'hypodermic' theories of communication whereby passive individuals are injected with information that they then internalise.¹¹⁶ The idea that information exposure 'triggers' a cultural 'immune response' risks oversimplifying the process of persuasion, making it seem more automatic and easy than it is. It implies too linear a connection between spreading 'viral' content, persuasion, and behavioural impact. Fact-checking and media literacy campaigns oversimplify similarly, assuming that just showing someone that news is inaccurate will prevent them from sharing it.¹¹⁷

Such biological metaphors are still used uncritically in academic research,¹¹⁸ though this is less common now. Media and communication research in particular have long recognised how oversimplistic such approaches to communication are. Still, the oversimplification persists in media coverage and in policy responses to dis- and misinformation. This was shown early in the COVID-19 pandemic, with the World Health Organisation expressing concern about an

114 Ibid., p.6.

115 Monica Bulger, and Patrick Davison, 'The Promises, Challenges and Futures of Media Literacy', *Data and Society*, 21 February 2018. [Accessed 21 December 2019]; S. Jeong, H. Cho and Y. Hwang, 'Media Literacy Interventions: A Meta-analytic Review', *Journal of Communication*, 62 (2012): 454–72.

116 A. Marwick, 'Why Do People Share Fake News? A Sociotechnical Model of Media Effects', *Georgetown Law Technology Review*, 2 (2018): 474–512.

117 Ibid., p. 477.

118 J. Zarocostas, 'How to Fight an Infodemic', *The Lancet*, 395, N° 10225 (2020): 676.

‘infodemic’ spreading in parallel with the disease itself.¹¹⁹ Supposedly there was a simultaneous ‘global epidemic of misinformation’ that ‘poses a serious problem for public health’ and ‘goes faster and further, like the viruses that travel with people go faster and further’.¹²⁰

Such analogies make for catchy headlines—and they do allude to a valid concern. However, they perpetuate oversimplified understandings of how dis- and misinformation spread and exert an impact on beliefs and behaviours. They may also lead to an overestimation of how straightforward it might be to change people’s behaviour through counter-disinformation campaigns. Marwick’s US study found that some people shared partisan disinformation despite knowing it was false, because their priority was to signal shared identity with others.¹²¹ Within the frame of ‘culture wars’, increasingly invoked to describe contemporary politics, it may be that people are sharing dis- or misinformation more to provoke or ‘trigger’ their perceived opponents rather than because they actually believe it. Such examples suggest a far more complex web of online and offline, cognitive and social interactions that mediate whether people share dis- or misinformation, and whether it shapes beliefs or behaviours.

To be fair, Rushkoff et al., while continuing to claim that a biological approach to disinformation is useful, acknowledge that persuasion is more complex. Complicating their own communication model, they explain that inoculation efforts also require an understanding of ‘the society, culture, economics, technologies, and other factors that allow particular memes, and memes in general, to thrive’.¹²² Understanding all of these elements would certainly help counter disinformation, memetic or otherwise. However, this more holistic approach is far from the more common understanding of inoculation as a refined, targeted approach to a particular pathogen—as shown by the description of COVID-19-related misinformation as an ‘infodemic’. This makes the metaphor less helpful overall.

When biological metaphors concerning ‘inoculation’ are used oversimplistically to describe disinformation responses, they also risk downplaying human agency and the importance of trust in the communicator. Individuals are susceptible to (dis)information that confirms their existing views. If they are not interested in a

119 Jingling Hua, and Rajib Shaw, ‘Corona Virus (COVID-19) “Infodemic” and Emerging Issues through a Data Lens: The Case of China’, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17, N° 7 (2020): 2309.

120 Zarocostas, ‘How to Fight’.

121 Marwick, ‘Why Do People’, p. 505.

122 Rushkoff et al., ‘The Biology’, p. 10.

piece of news, however true, they will likely not engage with it. The persuasiveness of disinformation depends on the knowledge and beliefs people bring to their interaction with information. Second, unlike the spread of an organic pathogen, whether information ‘infects’ someone is mediated by their trust in the source. This is very different from implying there is a general disinformation pathogen that is ‘out there’, against which individuals or cultures can be inoculated.

Solutions based on oversimplistic understandings of ‘inoculation’ risk ignoring the fact that improved media literacy will make people more critical of *all* information, including that which comes from government. The ideal liberal democratic outcome of a media literacy campaign would presumably be for citizens to be more critical of information that seems ‘anti-democratic’, in the sense that it undermines society, electoral processes, and social cohesion, or advocates alternative systems of government. Conversely, presumably it would be ideal if citizens were *less* critical of information that upholds democratic values and processes. The ideological assumption that liberal democracy is a preferable form of government makes it seem common sense that, if people are made more critically aware, they will naturally reject anti-democratic information when they find it.

Media literacy, seen through the lens of the ‘inoculation’ metaphor, is too blunt a tool to do this. If one insists on using medical metaphors to describe media literacy, it is more a broad-spectrum antibiotic that attacks everything, good and bad, rather than a vaccine against a specific strain of (dis)information that the state deems invidious. Media literacy, after all, is ‘a form of critical thinking that asks people to doubt what they see’.¹²³ As Danah Boyd asserts about the man who conducted a shooting at the restaurant implicated in the (false) Pizzagate conspiracy in the US, ‘what he was doing was something that we’ve taught people to do—question the information they’re receiving and find out the truth for themselves’.¹²⁴

Improved media literacy is theoretically healthy for democracies. More critically aware citizens should be better able to reason their way to optimal solutions for social issues.¹²⁵ However, at a point where trust in government and traditional media is low, improved media literacy will place an even more critical spotlight on how governments communicate, and may further undermine trust in news media more generally.

123 Danah Boyd, ‘You Think You Want Media Literacy... Do You?’, *Medium*, 9 March 2018. [Accessed 13 December 2019]

124 Ibid.

125 Jacobs et al., *Talking Together*.

Strategic communications around the COVID-19 crisis in the UK illustrates this well. Far more prominently than the 5G conspiracy theory, both traditional media and government communications are presenting citizens with a variety of different models and calculations about how the disease will spread and how many have died ‘of’ it or ‘with’ it. Daily coverage focuses on the contention between different experts about whose figures are more accurate. In other words, a public debate is going on about how scientific data is constructed and interpreted. This seems positive—it has the potential to make people more critically aware of the selectivity and interpretivity inherent in data that quantitative researchers might prefer to present as ‘objective’. But this could go both ways—making people more sceptical of such data may make them distrust all scientific data. Indeed, this is a recognised tactic when political actors seek to discredit scientific research generally—based on the claim that if scientists cannot agree, all of their data must be similarly unreliable. Climate change denial is a prominent recent example. These elements of the contemporary communication environment are too complex to be resolved simply by improving media literacy.¹²⁶

5. Examine disinformation’s impact on trust and social cohesion multidimensionally

Two areas of concern regarding disinformation’s impact are its effects on trust and social cohesion. With disinformation’s impact typically assumed rather than demonstrated, these require robust and extensive research. The following sections suggest how this research might proceed.

Concern about disinformation is inextricably tied to a perceived trust crisis in liberal democracies. This concern predates fears about disinformation. Successive polls identify declining trust in politicians, government, organised religion, health services, police, and the media.¹²⁷ For some the crisis is existential—if disinformation can undermine trust between people and democratic governments, they fear people might reject the existing political order in favour of an alternative.¹²⁸

126 Silvio Waisbord, ‘Truth Is What Happens to News: On Journalism, Fake News, and Post-Truth’, *Journalism Studies*, 19, N° 13 (2018): 1866–78.

127 For instance see Edelman *Trust Barometer Global Reports*, [Accessed 1 March 2020]; Gallup’s ongoing *Trust in Government* analysis [Accessed 1 March 2020]; Pew Centre for Research *Global Attitude Surveys*. [Accessed 1 March 2020].

128 Watts, *Whose Truth*.

To research disinformation's impact on trust, we must re-evaluate how we think about trust. Trust involves an acceptance of vulnerability in the expectation of certain outcomes and behaviours in a given situation.¹²⁹ It is a social process we rely on daily—trusting doctors to maintain our health, utilities companies to deliver us clean food and water, etc. It is widely believed that democratic governments rely on people's trust to govern effectively.¹³⁰

Accordingly, when commentators identify a decline in trust, they see a problem to be tackled.¹³¹ This reflects the common-sense assumption that there is an overall quantity of trust in society that should be increased. This is wrong. First, more trust does not necessarily mean a better society. Balance is needed. Too little trust renders society ungovernable. Whereas if people trust political leaders too much, they may help bring about tyranny. Without some distrust, governments will not be held to account by their citizens. Democracy therefore needs both trust and distrust. They are not opposite ends of a spectrum but separate concepts that co-exist.¹³² Ronald Reagan's maxim of 'trust but verify' in nuclear negotiations captures this well: one needs both trust and distrust in many instances. This should be reflected in research into disinformation's impact, not least in designing research to evaluate the many survey indicators of trust.

Similarly, with disinformation, the issue is not a lack of trust in society.¹³³ From the perspective of the liberal democratic state, there is too much trust in some information sources and too little in others.¹³⁴ 'Fake news' is *more* trusted today than before and no one suggests we should encourage this.¹³⁵ Fear of social media 'echo chambers' implies too much trust in sources of information that confirm pre-existing ideological views, and too little in more 'objective' sources. Increasing levels of trust in society is not the problem. What is needed is better trust, not more trust.

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129 F. Granelli, 'What Does it Mean for a Communication to be 'Trusted'', *Defence Strategic Communications*, 5 (2018): 171—214.

130 J. R. Clark, and Dwight Lee, 'The Optimal Trust in Government', *Eastern Economic Journal*, 27, N° 1 (2001): 19—34.

131 Watts, *Whose Truth*.

132 Granelli, 'What Does it Mean'.

133 Examples such as Airbnb, TaskRabbit, RelayRides, Getaround, Fon, and Lending Club show there is still plenty of trust in society. See R. Botsman, *Who Can You Trust? How Technology Brought Us Together—and Why It Could Drive Us Apart* (London: Penguin, 2017).

134 Ibid.

135 Granelli, 'What Does it Mean'.

Better trust would mean more trust being placed in sources of verifiable, factual information, and less in actors deliberately attempting to disinform through false or misleading content. Better trust is also a two-way process. Governments calling for citizens to trust them will have little success unless they also communicate that they trust their people. This is especially challenging with counter-disinformation campaigns. A campaign asking that people be more critical of information sources is easily read as the government saying they do not trust citizens to interpret information accurately. This creates a significant challenge for practitioners designing counter-disinformation campaigns. Telling people they aren't critical enough when dealing with information is a message few will accept (even if it is true).

The relationship between trust and disinformation depends on the disinformation's source and content. There are different types of trust: personal, social, general, systemic, and institutional.¹³⁶ For governments concerned about disinformation, two are especially pertinent. The first is disinformation that could undermine *institutional* trust between state and citizen. This might suggest the government is lying—a typical claim in conspiracy theories—or failing to provide security and prosperity. The second is disinformation aimed at undermining *interpersonal* trust between citizens in society. By exploiting inequalities and fissures, it is feared that disinformation is undermining social cohesion, making communities less 'resilient' against threats.¹³⁷

Disinformation can attack institutional and interpersonal trust simultaneously. The Christchurch attacker, Brenton Tarrant, cited the 'White Genocide' conspiracy theory that Western governments are complicit in the 'Islamisation' of their societies.¹³⁸ Assuming this is untrue and therefore dis- or misinformation, this potentially undermines *institutional* trust by suggesting that government is failing to protect people from a perceived threat. It may also weaken *interpersonal* trust between Muslims and the rest of society. Similarly, disinformation around Brexit might undermine trust between citizens and government, between citizens and other citizens whom they accuse of voting to impoverish them, and between citizens and media outlets they consider to be promoting disinformation about the issue.

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136 W. Mishler, and R. Rose, 'What are the Origins of Political Trust? Testing Institutional and Cultural Theories in Post-Communist Societies', *Comparative Political Studies*, 34, N° 1 (2001): 30–62.

137 Tucker et al., *Social Media*.

138 Lizzie Dearden, 'New Zealand Attack: How Nonsensical White Genocide Conspiracy Theory Cited by Alleged Gunman is Spreading Poison Around the World', *Independent*, 16 March 2019. [Accessed 16 January 2020]

Being more specific about forms of trust is essential because increasing trust in one relationship may undermine trust in another. If you convince people to trust the emotional instinct of a friend over expert or official information, they may trust official sources less.

Institutional trust and disinformation in the 2019 British General Election

The risk of disinformation undermining institutional trust between states and citizens was highlighted by the 2019 British General Election campaign. Early commentary highlighted the apparent impunity with which the main parties—but according to analysts primarily the Conservative Party—employed overt disinformation to secure votes.¹³⁹ This was despite their erroneous claims being swiftly highlighted and debunked by fact-checking services, news outlets, and citizens on social media.

To add context, in early 2019 the Theresa May administration introduced a public-health style counter-disinformation campaign because of concern about the UK being undermined by disinformation from hostile external actors, especially Russia. With the tagline ‘Don’t Feed the Beast’, the aim was to encourage people to be more cautious in what they share because ‘things aren’t always what they seem online’.¹⁴⁰ Highlighting this is useful, although looking closer, the campaign risked replicating the limitations of thinking about disinformation that we identified earlier. Not only does it focus exclusively on information shared online, the examples it cites are of ‘hoax stories’ and ‘false accusations’.¹⁴¹ The campaign offers ‘SHARE’ as an acronym citizens can remember to help them avoid ‘feeding the beast’ of online disinformation. Social media users are invited to double check the **S**ource of information, read beyond the **H**eadline, **A**nalyse factual content to check if it is true, check whether any content has been **R**etouched or edited, and look for **E**rrors in URLs, bad grammar, or awkward layouts.¹⁴² This checklist would be most useful for ‘fake news’ websites masquerading as legitimate news sources, but as we have already established, this is a small fraction of UK news. Moreover, the campaign appears to evade addressing the main disinformation concerns of

139 Joe Mayes, and Kitty Donaldson, ‘U.K. Plans to Review Rules After 2019 Campaign of Lies and Smears’, Bloomberg, 10 December 2019. [Accessed 19 December 2019]; Reid and Dotto, ‘Thousands of Misleading’.

140 ‘Share Checklist: Don’t Feed the Beast’.

141 Ibid.

142 Ibid.

British citizens—misleading disinformation from established media outlets and politicians, both offline and online.

The 2019 election campaign was remarkable for how flagrantly these concerns were violated by the main political parties, but most frequently by the incumbent Conservative Party.¹⁴³ Consider the following examples, using the government's own SHARE framework:

Source—The Conservative Party relabelled its Twitter account @factcheckUK during a televised debate, giving a false impression that it was a non-partisan, impartial news verification service.

Headline—The Liberal Democrat Party published election leaflets masquerading as local newspapers in style, containing graphs that misrepresented them as the only party with a previous vote share large enough to challenge incumbents in various constituencies.

Analyse—The fact-checking organisation First Draft found that Labour, the Conservatives, and the Liberal Democrats all published misleading advertising, though by far the most frequent were the Conservative Party. 88% of their most shared online adverts between 1 and 4 December 2019 were coded as containing misleading information, compared to 6.7% for Labour.

Retouched—The Conservative Party re-edited a televised interview of Keir Starmer, then the Labour Shadow Brexit Secretary, to remove his answer to a question, giving the false impression that he failed to answer.

Errors—Early in the campaign, the Conservative Party adopted what are referred to as 'shitposting' tactics; deliberately posting poorly formatted and low-quality content on the assumption that this would achieve greater spread through the criticism it would attract.¹⁴⁴

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¹⁴³ Reid and Dotto, 'Thousands of Misleading'.

¹⁴⁴ Mayes and Donaldson, 'U.K. Plans'; Reid and Dotto, 'Thousands of Misleading'.

Misleading content and unkept manifesto promises are nothing new during elections. Indeed, during the 2019 campaign, the Brexit Party sought to rebrand their ‘manifesto’ as a ‘contract’, because ‘everybody knows that a manifesto is little more than a set of vague promises that its authors have no intention of keeping’.¹⁴⁵ Traditional media were accused of spreading misleading disinformation too. The BBC was criticised by all sides for bias towards the other parties, most prominently when they edited out footage of audience laughter at Prime Minister Boris Johnson after he explained the importance of people in power telling the truth.¹⁴⁶

Even if some of these tactics are not novel, the impunity with which they were employed appears new, at least in the UK. When found out, Conservative Party representatives were unapologetic for rebranding their Twitter account as a fact-checking site, and for editing video footage of the interview with Starmer.¹⁴⁷ Such conduct risks further undermining institutional trust between political parties and the electorate. This is especially probable since early commentary suggests citizens are increasingly aware of disinformation given its prominence in public discourse since the Brexit referendum.¹⁴⁸ What we now need is robust sociological research to examine the impact this behaviour has societally on beliefs and behaviours. Purposefully misleading audiences and then being unapologetic when found out undermines moral codes in many societies. As it is so transgressive, its negative impact seems obvious, although it seems important to substantiate the extent of the damage.

Spreading disinformation could have significant costs to the credibility of the perpetrators, but without knowing more about disinformation’s impact, it is difficult to calculate whether the cost of exposure is worthwhile. It may be that electoral disinformation poses limited costs—and therefore has limited effect—because citizens expect politicians to lie in elections anyway. Here the COVID-19 crisis may be revealing in that it might show whether using such flagrant disinformation tactics has significant consequences. On a daily basis, the British government is trying to persuade British citizens that its reported death tolls are accurate. It wants citizens to believe the message that it is

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145 Brexit Party, ‘Contract with the People’, *thebrexitparty.org*, 2019. [Accessed 23 December 2019]

146 BBC, ‘BBC Acknowledges “Mistake” in Boris Johnson Editing’, *BBC News*, 25 November 2019. [Accessed 23 December 2019]

147 Rob Merrick, ‘Tory Minister Says “No One Gives a Toss” About Fake Fact Checker Set Up by Official Party Twitter Account’, *Independent*, 20 November 2019. [Accessed 14 January 2020]

148 Mayes and Donaldson, ‘U.K. Plans’.

‘succeeding’ in controlling the epidemic, despite its recent electoral record of using disinformation tactics and admitting it unapologetically. It would be interesting to examine whether citizens consider these recent examples when assessing the credibility of government COVID-19 messaging, or whether their generic, longer-term trust in politicians is more significant.

Interpersonal trust and social cohesion

As well as examining whether disinformation is impacting institutional trust, we know little about whether disinformation is undermining interpersonal trust between citizens in societies. The impact of disinformation on interpersonal trust can be understood as part of the broader issue of social cohesion. Social cohesion loosely describes the ‘collective togetherness’ of a group, of which interpersonal trust is a core constituent.¹⁴⁹ Cohesive societies appear to possess ‘close social relations, pronounced emotional connectedness to the social entity and a strong orientation towards the common good’.¹⁵⁰ Higher social cohesion is thought to make democracies more stable, participative, productive, and resilient.¹⁵¹

However, there is a growing perception that social cohesion is deteriorating in the Digital Age,¹⁵² and that disinformation contributes by exacerbating divisions. Little if any research demonstrates measurable effect, though. Social cohesion has subjective (cognitive) and objective (behavioural) elements.¹⁵³ Subjective cohesion concerns how far people *perceive* they belong within a given community. Objective cohesion concerns how social cohesion is manifested in *actual behaviours*, for instance community work, memberships of local organisations, or simply interacting with others.¹⁵⁴ The moral panic around disinformation may reflect a decline in *perceived* social cohesion, but it is not clear whether disinformation has altered *objective* social cohesion, i.e. made people behave in a less cohesive way.

149 N. Friedkin, ‘Social Cohesion’, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 30, N° 1 (2004): 409—25.

150 D. Schiefer and J. van der Noll, ‘The Essentials of Social Cohesion: A Literature Review’, *Social Indicators Research*, 132 (2017): p. 592.

151 Joseph Chan, Hong-Po To, and Elaine Chan, ‘Reconsidering Social Cohesion: Developing a Definition and Analytical Framework for Empirical Research’, *Social Indicators Research*, 75, N° 2 (2006): 273—302.

152 European Committee for Social Cohesion, *A New Strategy for Social Cohesion*, (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2004). [Accessed 16 January 2020]

153 K. Bollen, and R. Hoyle, ‘Perceived Cohesion: A Conceptual and Empirical Examination’, *Social Forces*, 69, N° 2 (1990): 479—504.

154 Ibid.

Happily, both subjective and objective social cohesion may offer indicators to measure change over time. Robert Putnam's work *Bowling Alone* creatively used reduced participation in local bowling leagues as a proxy measure of American societal decline, but this was relevant only in a particular context and time period.¹⁵⁵ Research is needed into appropriate proxies of social cohesion in other countries and contexts.

Identifying behaviour change is ideal, but measuring perceived (subjective) social cohesion remains useful. People who perceive that their social networks are less cohesive may decide to interact less with others, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. Experimental research on 'affective polarisation'—the dislike of those with opposing views—has shown that people exposed to vitriolic, partisan content online perceive political opponents more negatively.¹⁵⁶ They self-report a reduced willingness to live near, or have a relative marry, someone from across partisan divides.¹⁵⁷ This illustrates one way disinformation could exert behavioural impact, and the potential for experimental research to reveal other mechanisms.

Measuring disinformation's real-world impact on social cohesion is harder as it will be one factor among many. Economic and social inequality, and immigration if poorly managed, can undermine social cohesion.¹⁵⁸ The long-term impact of disinformation must be considered before trying to isolate its short-term impact. Rather than beginning with disinformation that is 'out there' in the media environment, it may be more productive to begin by mapping issues people face at the community level *before* considering what effect disinformation might have.

Research on social cohesion must also reflect the increased complexity of communication in the Digital Age. Our reference to 'social cohesion' contrasts deliberately with 'community cohesion', which we argue is less useful, despite receiving considerable research attention. Communities can be defined as 'place-

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155 Putnam measured social capital rather than social cohesion, though the example is still instructive of different proxies of objective social cohesion. R. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

156 Elizabeth Suhay et al., 'The Polarizing Effects of Online Partisan Criticism: Evidence from Two Experiments', *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 23, N° 1 (2018): 95–115.

157 Ibid.

158 Gianluca Grimalda, and Nicholas Tanzer, *Social Cohesion, Global Governance and the Future of Politics: Understanding and Fostering Social Cohesion*, Think 20 Argentina, (Consejo Argentino para las Relaciones Internacionales, 2018). [Accessed 16 December 2019]

based’ or ‘interest-based’.¹⁵⁹ A place-based community is one delineated by social relationships within a given territory or neighbourhood. An interest-based community is delineated by a shared sense of belonging and identity among its members, for example a religious community, which need not be place-based.¹⁶⁰ The internet has made it far easier for interest-based communities to proliferate.¹⁶¹

Democratic governments have devoted attention to community cohesion but have typically viewed communities as ‘geographically limited entit[ies]’ in particularly areas or neighbourhoods.¹⁶² Place-based understandings of communities have dominated policy approaches in many countries, especially the perceived (self-) segregation of Muslim communities and the fear that this creates a favourable climate for Salafi-jihadist radicalisation.¹⁶³

This place-based understanding of community is inadequate when considering the complex networks of virtual and physical groups that interact with disinformation. The far right and Alt-Right, for example, cannot be adequately described as place-based communities. The category of ‘virtual community’ is also too simplistic. Rather, far right groups comprise a network of networks combining longstanding members of fringe and mainstream political parties; anti-Islam activists; certain users of 4Chan, 8Chan, and Reddit; Gamergaters; white supremacists; neo-Nazis; certain men’s rights activists; right-wing conspiracy theorists; and various media outlets that promote their causes.¹⁶⁴ These networks do not necessarily imagine themselves as a community. Trust dynamics are embedded in a complex and amorphous patchwork of digital and offline relationships. Their causes may overlap around a specific issue, before reconfiguring ad hoc around a different one. Research into disinformation’s impact on social cohesion would ideally factor in this complexity.

159 L. Manzo, and D. Perkins, ‘Finding Common Ground: The Importance of Place Attachment to Community Participation and Planning’, *Journal of Planning Literature*, 20, N° 4 (2006): 335–50.

160 C. Firth, D. Maye, and D. Pearson, ‘Developing “Community” in Community Gardens’, *Local Environment*, 16, N° 6 (2011): 555–68.

161 F. Henri, and B. Pudelko, ‘Understanding and Analysing Activity and Learning in Virtual Communities’, *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, 19, N° 4 (2003): 474–87.

162 M. Mahrt, ‘Conversations About Local Media and Their Role in Community Integration’, *Communications*, 33, N° 2 (2008): 233–46.

163 J. Flint, and D. Robinson, *Community Cohesion in Crisis? New Dimensions of Diversity and Difference* (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2008).

164 Alice Marwick, and Rebecca Lewis, ‘Media Manipulation and Disinformation Online’, *Data and Society*, 15 May 2017. [Accessed 18 December 2019]

The Impact of Disinformation: A strategic, multidimensional research and policy agenda

Having advocated a shift in how disinformation is conceptualised and studied, what might subsequent research or policy interventions look like? First, there is a need to embrace complexity. Disinformation is a complex issue—its impact lacks a single cause or solution.¹⁶⁵ Even if novel technologies are not as significant as commonly assumed,¹⁶⁶ the Digital Age has made social relationships more complex as online and offline networks have been layered together. Landscapes of trust and social cohesion have shifted, with horizontal networks of informal online relationships intersecting with existing networks and hierarchies. These fluid and seemingly more fragmented dynamics, combined with the speed of communication flows, increase the difficulty of examining disinformation's impact. Research and policy interventions must embrace this. Reducing the amount of disinformation 'out there' in the communication environment is useful, but will bring limited understanding of its impact.

Our starting assumption is that disinformation exerts impact only if individuals engage with its content. The issues or events it examines must interest audiences, otherwise they will simply ignore it.¹⁶⁷ The 5G coronavirus conspiracy theory will interest some. Others will not engage with it as they have their own beliefs—as with the conspiracy theory that the higher ethnic minority casualty rate in the UK reflects a conspiracy against them. Removing Salafi-jihadist disinformation that claims that COVID-19 is God's retribution against apostates will make no difference to the climate change activist who already believes that it is Nature's response to overpopulation. Focusing on the spread of such content on social media, and how best to remove it or regulate the medium, neglects the nuances explaining the persistence of such beliefs in the first place.

We therefore advocate an event or issue-based approach to studying and countering the societal impact of disinformation. Contrary to existing approaches, this does not begin with disinformation and how to reduce its spread. Rather, it begins with an issue or event and the social networks that it affects. Such an approach might be structured as follows:

1. Identifying an event or issue causing contention. This could be short or long term.

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¹⁶⁵ European Commission, *A Multidimensional*.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Tandoc et al., 'Diffusion'.

2. Determining the networks for whom the issue is relevant - they may be physical, virtual or imagined.
3. Mapping the landscape of trust in these networks—which sources of information are trusted and why. This includes both trust in institutions, and interpersonal trust between individuals and within groups.
4. Identifying the tensions and identities within these networks that might be targeted.
5. Only then considering how disinformation and misinformation might exacerbate these tensions.
6. Considering which counter-disinformation activities might be effective.

From a policy perspective, an events-based or issues-based approach offers a more targeted and strategic way to counter disinformation than those that focus on technology platforms used to inject disinformation into society. It offers a more realistic assessment of the impacts of disinformation. One could reduce the amount of disinformation on a given platform but this does not mean it shaped beliefs or behaviours meaningfully. Focusing first on events or issues would also help make governments' counter-disinformation efforts more proactive than reactive. It may be possible to anticipate future political events or issues that might become the target of disinformation. Government strategic communicators can better prepare.

This approach is applicable to both research on the societal impact of disinformation and on counter-disinformation efforts. Research should be multidimensional, mixed-method, online and offline. The impact of dis/misinformation is likely to be easier to measure in the short term. However, longer term approaches are important, particularly in tracing the underlying beliefs and stories that influence which information and sources are trusted in a given cultural context. Tools such as social network analysis can help map communication networks. Longitudinal studies using methods such as sentiment analysis may make it more possible to trace shifts in sentiment in the wake of disinformation campaigns. Surveys and panel data would be useful in monitoring longitudinally and comparatively shifts in different forms of trust before, during, and after events. However, there is a need to combine them with qualitative research to examine exactly what 'trust in media' means to citizens

and how they assess this as they engage with (dis)information on a daily basis. A survey seeking to measure trust in a given social media platform may reveal little, given that information on a particular platform comes in many forms. If a social media site hosts an online newspaper article, how do people weigh up their trust in the platform against the source of the article? How do people assess the veracity of these different sources when an offline friend, family member, or colleague presents alternative interpretations from their preferred sources?

Research on different dimensions of trust and how they may affect belief in disinformation is now developing. Zimmerman and Kohring's longitudinal study before, during, and after the 2017 German parliamentary election campaign has shown that institutional distrust in traditional news media was associated with an increased tendency to believe online disinformation.¹⁶⁸ Distrust in the political system generally was associated with greater belief in online disinformation too, and greater support for right-wing parties. Hameleers et al. have shown that disinformation combining visual and textual content is slightly more believable than text alone.¹⁶⁹ Intriguingly, emerging research on 'deep fakes' suggests they may not mislead people easily, but they do make people distrust social media news more.¹⁷⁰ More research needs to be done to examine these dimensions of trust in different media, countries, and contexts. The offline dimension remains notably absent. It should be incorporated.

Understanding how people navigate and trust information sources in specific contexts likely requires qualitative sociological and ethnographic research. The more community-specific research is, the better. For instance, researchers have observed increasing disinformation campaigns on messaging platforms such as WhatsApp, Telegram, WeChat, and Snapchat.¹⁷¹ This is unsurprising—as an app's public popularity increases, political actors will obviously try to exploit it. However, the extent to which trust in information varies by platform, or how people assess its veracity compared to offline sources, remains poorly understood. How communities on 4chan or 8chan interact with disinformation will be different from how people interact on Twitter. There may be significant

168 Fabian Zimmermann, and Matthias Kohring, 'Mistrust, Disinforming News, and Vote Choice: A Panel Survey on the Origins and Consequences of Believing Disinformation in the 2017 German Parliamentary Election', *Political Communication*, 37, N° 2 (2020): 215–37.

169 M. Hameleers et al., 'A Picture Paints a Thousand Lies? The Effects and Mechanisms of Multimodal Disinformation and Rebuttals Disseminated via Social Media', *Political Communication*, 37, N° 2 (2020): 281–301.

170 Christian Vaccari and Andrew Chadwick, 'Deepfakes and Disinformation: Exploring the Impact of Synthetic Political Video on Deception, Uncertainty, and Trust in News', *Social Media & Society*, 6, N° 1 (2020).

171 Bradshaw and Howard, 'The Global'.

differences within different threads on a given platform, about which we still understand relatively little.

Offline ethnographic research would be especially valuable. We know little about how families and friends discuss and debate the dis- and misinformation they come across in everyday life. Yet as per the 5G conspiracy theory, such discussions are likely to be vital in transforming awareness of an issue into offline action to address it. Coronavirus has seen a massive spike in television news viewing, as people throughout Britain convene for daily government news conferences. Concerns about disinformation are embedded throughout this process, with ongoing questioning of whether the government is lying about deaths, or misleading citizens by obscuring the evidence base for its recommendations. We know little about the discussions people have offline about these media events, what shapes choices about which information to trust and from whom, and how a given medium shapes verification practices. Do people trust information viewed live on television more, even though they may be able to access far more detailed information online? Are they less likely to seek to verify information on televised news than information viewed online? Interviews, surveys, focus groups, and ethnographic research, ideally in combination, would provide far deeper insights into these issues, most probably on non-COVID-19-related topics given the impediment of social distancing. Such activities would ground disinformation research more strongly in citizens' everyday experiences. This would provide greater breadth and balance in a field still dominated by research quantifying the spread of disinformation online.

If the trend of leading politicians sowing disinformation with apparent impunity continues, how does this affect how parents and teachers explain to children the costs of lying? How do such conversations play out—not just online, but at the dinner table in citizens' homes, in front of the television, and on the way to the polling booth? These elements are especially important given that citizens spread dis- and misinformation too, and can contribute to their own disenfranchisement in the process.¹⁷²

Conclusion

This paper has argued for a rethink in how disinformation is conceptualised and studied in order to assess its impact more productively. Most disinformation

¹⁷² Mejias and Vokuev, 'Disinformation'.

research focuses on its spread rather than on its impact on beliefs or behaviours. It is top down, focusing first on disinformation spread by malign actors—how it spreads and what content is spread. Few, if any, studies have provided evidence of measurable impact on trust or community cohesion. Democracy-undermining effects are assumed, but rarely demonstrated.

We contend that disinformation's impact will be more productively examined if more research employs hybrid media approaches and goes beyond social media to examine traditional media and offline communication. We have sought to show the importance of this using recent examples in the UK between the 2016 Brexit referendum, and the early stages of the COVID-19 outbreak, including the government's counter-disinformation policies that emerged in between. These examples show the importance of exploring cultural variations in the media ecologies through which disinformation spreads and how various groups perceive disinformation. The UK illustrates that counter-disinformation policy focusing mainly on *social media*, *false* content, and *external* actors will have limited impact given the greater prominence of *misleading* content in *traditional* media spread by *domestic* political actors.

Disinformation research must look beyond spread to examine broader societal impacts. Impact on trust and social cohesion should be examined directly rather than being assumed. It is important to develop a common language to engage with these issues. This language should be sensitive to complexities that are hidden when using oversimplistic ideas of disinformation being a 'pathogen' to be defeated by 'inoculation'.

Disinformation has no single cause or solution. Research and policy interventions should reflect this. 'Solutions that are based on misdiagnosis, particularly on imagining that Facebook, or bots, or the Russians are the core threat, will likely miss their mark.'¹⁷³ More robust studies use mixed methods, combining experiments, surveys, interviews, and focus groups with direct recording or observation of behaviour.¹⁷⁴ Most research examines a single platform, such as Twitter. Broadening this to interactions between multiple platforms and offline behaviour would be helpful. More sociological, ethnographic research to understand how people interact with disinformation in everyday life is imperative.

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¹⁷³ Benkler et al., *Network Propaganda*, p. 379.

¹⁷⁴ Guess et al., 'Less Than You Think'.

Most importantly, if disinformation persuades by resonating with existing beliefs, then its persuasiveness is contingent not only on its content or delivery medium but also on the beliefs and knowledge an audience already possesses. This underlines the importance of adopting an issue- or event-specific approach to understanding disinformation's impact. Generally reducing the amount of disinformation in the media environment is useful, as is regulating online platforms and political advertising. Now researchers need to address what impact disinformation is *actually* having on society.

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UNDERSTANDING ‘FAKE NEWS’: A BIBLIOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE

Andrew Park, Matteo Montecchi,
Cai ‘Mitsu’ Feng, Kirk Plangger, and
Leyland Pitt

Abstract

False information that appears similar to trustworthy media content, or what is commonly referred to as ‘fake news’, is pervasive in both traditional and digital strategic communication channels. This paper presents a comprehensive bibliographic analysis of published academic articles related to ‘fake news’ and the related concepts of truthiness, post-factuality, and deepfakes. Using the Web of Science database and VOSViewer software, papers published on these topics were extracted and analysed to identify and visualise key trends, influential authors, and journals focusing on these topics. Articles in our dataset tend to cite authors, papers, and journals that are also within the dataset, suggesting that the conversation surrounding ‘fake news’ is still relatively centralised. Based on our findings, this paper develops a conceptual ‘fake news’ framework—derived from variations of the intention to deceive and/or harm—classifying ‘fake news’ into four subtypes: mis-information, dis-information, mal-information, and non-information. We conclude that most existing studies of ‘fake news’ investigate mis-information and dis-information, thus we suggest further study of mal-information and non-information. This paper helps scholars, practitioners, and global policy makers who wish to understand the current state of the academic conversation related to ‘fake news’, and to determine important areas for further research.

Keywords—*‘fake news’, deepfakes, truthiness, post-fact, bibliometric analysis, misinformation, disinformation, mal-information, non-information, strategic communication, strategic communications*

About the Authors

Andrew Park is a PhD candidate at Simon Fraser University, Canada. His research interests include innovation and marketing and their intersection with technology management.

Matteo Montecchi is a Fellow in Marketing at King's College London, United Kingdom. He is interested in exploring the strategic value of transparency in marketing and media.

Cai 'Mitsu' Feng is a PhD student at Simon Fraser University, Canada. Her research interests include marketing strategies with social media.

Kirk Plangger is a Senior Lecturer in Marketing at King's College London, United Kingdom. His research concerns digital interactive technologies and marketing.

Leyland Pitt is a Professor of Marketing at Simon Fraser University, Canada. His interests are in the interaction between marketing and technology.

Enter the Age of 'Fake News'

The practice of strategically disseminating and publishing false information has a long history in politics, international relations, and warfare, and can have extremely negative consequences for individuals and for society.¹ This has been especially true during the global COVID-19 pandemic, with not only politicians and pundits creating and spreading 'fake news', but also journalists and other trusted information sources.² Furthermore, 'fake news' on COVID-19 is also spreading like wildfire through invitation-only discussion forums on social media platforms,³ with potentially more dangerous consequences. While broadcast media are subject to some degree of public scrutiny, falsehoods spread through private and relatively closed networks can be magnified further, and given

1 Leonie Haiden, 'Tell Me Lies, Tell Me Sweet Little Lies', in Jente Althuis and Leonie Haiden (eds.) *Fake news: A Roadmap* (Riga: Latvia: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 2018); Chelsea McManus and Celeste Michaud, 'Never Mind the Buzzwords: Defining Fake News and Fake Truth', *Fake News: A Roadmap*.

2 Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, Richard Fletcher, Nic Newman, J. Scott Brennan, and Philip N. Howard, 'Navigating the "Infodemic": How People in Six Countries Access and Rate News and Information about Coronavirus', *Misinformation, Science, and Media* (2020): 2020–04. [Accessed 15 May 2020]; J. Scott Brennan, Felix Simon, Philip N. Howard, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, 'Types, Sources, and Claims of COVID-19 Misinformation', Reuters Institute 7 (2020). [Accessed 15 May 2020]

3 Mark Scott, 'Facebook's Private Groups are Abuzz with Coronavirus Fake News', *Politico*, 30 March 2020. [Accessed 15 May 2020]

credence by echo-chambers in discussion groups.⁴ Thus, in a broader context, strategic communications researchers and practitioners require an in-depth understanding of the potential threats and risks and of any other opportunities that arise from ‘fake news’ phenomena.

The rise of ‘fake news’ has brought these practices to the forefront not only of academic, business, and political discourses, but also of public, social media, and mass media debates.⁵ Although ‘fake news’ is loosely defined in the academic literature as ‘false news intended to mislead audiences’, the 2016 US presidential election shifted the usage of the term, that is, to call any statement ‘fake news’ now also serves to dismiss information one disagrees with for the purpose of closing down debate.⁶ Therefore, the modern practice of ‘fake news’ can be both strategically useful to, and also an impediment to, persuasive communications. This paper explores academic literature on ‘fake news’ to derive insights for future strategic communications research and practice.

Undoubtedly, early humans strategically communicated inaccurate and untruthful information to each other by signs or spoken words. The term ‘fake news’ or ‘false news’ as it was called in the past has identifiable origins in the seventeenth century, as individual actors in the English Civil War exploited the press to disseminate their preferred political viewpoints and to shape public opinion.⁷ In the early twentieth century, the silent movie era icon Stan Laurel’s catastrophic marriages and heavy drinking attracted vast media attention, although much of what was reported was untrue. His biographer John Connolly notes, ‘He [Laurel] wonders how many acres of newsprint have been filled by words he has not said, forming an entire alternative history of his life in which nothing has meaning or substance unless it forms the punch line to a gag’.⁸ Print media and radio accelerated the spread of false news in the first half of the twentieth century, and television expanded the trend in the latter half. However, it was the advent of the internet as we know it today, in the mid-1990s, and the emergence of social media in the early twenty-first century that have really put the generation and dissemination of ‘fake news’ into overdrive.⁹

4 Kelly R. Garrett, ‘Echo Chambers Online?: Politically Motivated Selective Exposure Among Internet News Users’, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 14, N° 2 (2009): 265–85; Andrei Boutyline and Robb Willer, ‘The Social Structure of Political Echo Chambers: Variation in Ideological Homophily in Online Networks’, *Political Psychology* 38, N° 3 (2017): 551–69.

5 Plangger, Kirk, and Leyland Pitt, ‘Brands and Brand Management Under Threat in an Age of Fake News’, *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 29, N° 2 (2020): 141–43.

6 McManus and Michaud, ‘Never Mind the Buzzwords’.

7 Ibid.

8 Connolly, John, He (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2017), p. 89.

9 McManus and Michaud, ‘Never Mind the Buzzwords’.

The ‘fake news’ phenomenon reached a fever pitch around the time of the 2016 US presidential election, when both Republicans and Democrats questioned the veracity of stories denigrating the opposition.¹⁰ Because of its key role in recent political discourse and the implications for influencing global policy decisions, ‘fake news’ has attracted much attention from scholars, and a growing host of journals have begun serving the community of researchers interested in this phenomenon. Strategic communications researchers and practitioners need to further understand how the conversation surrounding ‘fake news’ is evolving, and how its practice is changing, not only in the mass media but in other strategic domains such as digital communication channels.¹¹

As the academic literature on ‘fake news’ is scattered among many different fields, a comprehensive mapping of this literature is needed to establish what has been written and what further questions are still to be investigated. As Jane Webster and Richard T. Watson posit, new theoretical and conceptual contributions need to be based on reviews and syntheses of extant thought in the literature, both for mature topics and also for emerging issues.¹² This paper provides a review and synthesis of the ‘fake news’ literature to develop concise insights for future strategic communications research and practice. Specifically, we seek answers to the following questions:

- How has the amount of research on ‘fake news’ evolved over time?
- What are the key terms associated with ‘fake news’ in the literature?
- Who are the most prominent researchers and what links do they have to each other?
- Which journals and universities are the most prolific and influential in their publication of ‘fake news’ research?

10 Hunt Allcott and Matthew Gentzkow, ‘Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election’, *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 31, N° 2 (2017): 211–36.

11 David M.J. Lazer, Matthew A. Baum, Yochai Benkler, Adam J. Berinsky, Kelly M. Greenhill, Filippo Menczer, Miriam J. Metzger, Brendan Nyhan, Gordon Pennycook, David Rothschild, Michael Schudson, Steven A. Sloman, Cass R. Sunstein, Emily A. Thorson, Duncan J. Watts, Jonathan L. Zittrain, ‘The Science of Fake News’, *Science* 359, N° 6380 (2018): 1094–96; Haiden, ‘Tell Me Lies; Plangger and Pitt, ‘Brands and Brand Management’.

12 Jane Webster and Richard T. Watson, ‘Analyzing the Past to Prepare for the Future: Writing a Literature Review’, *MIS Quarterly* (2002): xiii–xxiii.

One way of providing an overview map is through bibliographic analysis that can indicate trends in academic publication activity and trace relationships among authors, topics, and journals. Bibliographic reviews of the work published in specialist journals give guidance to the authors, readers, reviewers, and editors of these journals about where and how a conversation is taking place. Bibliographic reviews can be mapped to show the outlets from which these conversations originate and enable the identification of under- or over-researched topics and subtopics. A map of emerging topics can allow scholars to identify conceptual issues¹³ and to uncover interesting and important areas that require further investigation.¹⁴

To date, no such bibliographic reviews have been published on ‘fake news’, nor on the related topics of truthiness, deepfakes, or post-factuality. As these topics are central to future research initiatives, we suggest that this gap presents an opportunity. From a strategic communications management perspective, bibliographic analysis can serve to indicate which authors and journals are most influential and provide the most insightful and up-to-date thought leadership and empirical studies that advance the research on ‘fake news’.

This paper first discusses four relevant key terms we have used to direct our literature searches—‘fake news’, ‘truthiness’, ‘post-fact’, and ‘deepfake’. Then, we present visualisations of the bibliometric network of research conducted on ‘fake news’ using VOSViewer software. We then use the findings to propose a conceptual framework that deconstructs ‘fake news’ in two dimensions, namely, the intention to deceive and the intention to harm, and also provide four typologies of ‘fake news’: disinformation, misinformation, mal-information and non-information. The paper concludes with implications for strategic communications researchers and practitioners.

13 Sebastian K. Boell and Dubravka Cercez-Kecmanovic, ‘On Being “Systematic” in Literature Reviews’, in *Formulating Research Methods for Information Systems* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 48–78; Mary M. Crossan and Marina Apyaydin, ‘A Multidimensional framework of Organizational Innovation: A Systematic Review of the Literature’, *Journal of Management Studies* 47, N° 6 (2010): 1154–91; Dhruv Grewal, Nancy Puccinelli, and Kent B. Monroe, ‘Meta-analysis: Integrating Accumulated Knowledge’, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 46, N° 1 (2018): 9–30; Maria Sarmento and Cláudia Simões, ‘The Evolving Role of Trade Fairs in Business: A Systematic Literature Review and a Research Agenda’, *Industrial Marketing Management* 73 (2018): 154–70.

14 Christine Köhler, Murali K. Mantrala, Sönke Albers, and Vamsi K. Kanuri, ‘A Meta-analysis of Marketing Communication Carryover Effects’, *Journal of Marketing Research* 54, N° 6 (2017): 990–1008; Marko Kohtamäki, Rodrigo Rabetino, and Kristian Möller, ‘Alliance Capabilities: A Systematic Review and Future Research Directions’, *Industrial Marketing Management* 68 (2018): 188–201.

‘Fake news’, ‘Truthiness’, ‘Post-Fact’, and ‘Deepfakes’

Based on existing definitions,¹⁵ this paper defines ‘fake news’ as fabricated or false information that is disseminated through public media channels, including print, broadcast, and online. Furthermore, ‘fake news’ is not political satire (i.e. factual information presented in a news report format that bends the objective truth),¹⁶ news parody (i.e. non-factual information presented in a news report format),¹⁷ nor ‘native’ advertising (i.e. advertising presented as informational content).¹⁸ Tracking where 126,000 news stories originated and how they were shared by three million Twitter users, Soroush Vosoughi, Deb Roy, and Sinan Aral report that such content spreads much further, faster, more deeply and more broadly than real or true news content.¹⁹ One potential reason for this is that ‘fake news’ is often more novel and sensational; hence, it is more ‘compelling’ and triggers a more powerful emotional response.²⁰ Specifically, ‘fake news’ evokes fear, disgust, and surprise, whereas real news evokes sorrow, joy, and anticipation.²¹ Moving beyond the term ‘fake news’, academics write about the related terms of ‘truthiness’ and ‘post-fact’, as well as the emerging topic of ‘deepfakes’.

First, truthiness refers to circumstances in which the validity of something is based on how it ‘feels’, regardless of objective, verifiable facts.²² On 17 October 2015, the term was first coined by the American comedian Stephen Colbert on his television show the Colbert Report. When truthiness is evoked, ‘the world is as you wish it’.²³ A simple example of this would be the anti-vaccination lobby, who deny the wisdom of vaccination against serious infectious diseases despite overwhelming evidence that vaccination solves major health problems on a

15 Lazer et al., ‘The Science of Fake News; McManus and Michaud, ‘Never Mind the Buzzwords’.

16 McManus and Michaud, ‘Never Mind the Buzzwords’; Lindsay H. Hoffman and Dannagal G. Young, ‘Satire, Punch Lines, and the Nightly News: Untangling Media Effects on Political Participation’, *Communication Research Reports* 28, N° 2 (2011): 159–68; Jana Laura Egelhofer and Sophie Lecheler, ‘Fake news as a Two-dimensional Phenomenon: A Framework and Research Agenda’, *Annals of the International Communication Association* 43, N° 2 (2019): 97–116.

17 Egelhofer and Lecheler, ‘Fake news as a Two-Dimensional Phenomenon’; Jr, Edson C. Tandoc, Zheng Wei Lim, and Richard Ling, ‘Defining Fake News: A Typology of Scholarly Definitions’, *Digital Journalism* 6, N° 2 (2018): 137–53.

18 Colin Campbell and Lawrence J. Marks, ‘Good Native Advertising Isn’t a Secret’, *Business Horizons* 58, N° 6 (2015): 599–606; Colin Campbell and Nathaniel J. Evans, ‘The Role of a Companion Banner and Sponsorship Transparency in Recognizing and Evaluating Article-style Native Advertising’, *Journal of Interactive Marketing* 43 (2018): 17–32.

19 Soroush Vosoughi, Deb Roy, and Sinan Aral, ‘The Spread of True and False News Online’, *Science* 359, N° 6380 (2018): 1146–51.

20 Vosoughi et al., ‘The Spread of True and False News Online’; Paul Ekman, ‘An Argument for Basic Emotions’, *Cognition & Emotion* 6, N° 3–4 (1992): 169–200.

21 Vosoughi et al., ‘The Spread of True and False News Online’.

22 Pierre R. Berthon and Leyland F. Pitt, ‘Brands, Truthiness and Post-Fact: Managing Brands in a Post-rational World’, *Journal of Macromarketing* 38, N° 2 (2018): 218–27.

23 Berthon and Pitt, ‘Brands, Truthiness and Post-fact’, p. 218.

global scale. For example, at the time of writing, the Pacific nation of Samoa is facing a major measles crisis that has resulted in a number of deaths, and the declaration of a state of emergency. Measles inoculation rates in Samoa declined by around 50% between 2016 and 2018.²⁴

Second, Pierre R. Berthon and Leyland F. Pitt use the term ‘post-fact’ rather than the more common term ‘post-truth’, to differentiate it effectively from truthiness. They define ‘post-fact’ as taking a position that ignores facts. An example was President Trump’s advisor Kellyanne Conway who used the term ‘alternative facts’ during a ‘Meet the Press’ interview in January 2017, in which she defended Press Secretary Sean Spicer’s false statement about the attendance numbers at Trump’s presidential inauguration. Asked by a journalist, Chuck Todd, to explain why Spicer ‘utter[ed] a provable falsehood’, her clarification was that he was merely stating ‘alternative facts’. Todd’s response was that ‘alternative facts are not facts, they are falsehoods’.²⁵

Finally, the term ‘deepfake’ refers to the technological capability to create audio and video of real people saying and doing things they never said or did.²⁶ These range from the merely amusing—videos on YouTube in which comic actor Jim Carrey appears in Jack Nicholson’s famous role in *The Shining* to the more potentially troubling—Barack Obama insulting Donald Trump in a fabricated video with soundtrack; to the truly awful and offensive—the transposition of Indian journalist Rana Ayyub’s face onto the body of an adult movie actress with catastrophic reputational consequences. Deepfakes have the potential to cause immense damage. First, people tend not to doubt what they see and hear in video, and this makes deepfakes credible. Second, people tend to believe what they want to believe, and this is true for both ends of the political spectrum. Trump supporters might believe that Obama would say offensive things about their leader, and Obama supporters might believe that Trump deserves to have such things said about him and admire that their hero has the moral fortitude to say these things. The potential for conflict is significant. Third, as the Ayyub example illustrates, terrible damage can be done to the

24 Kwai, Isabella, ‘Samoa Closes Schools as Measles Epidemic Kills at Least 16’, *The New York Times*, 18 November 2019. [Accessed 15 May 2020]

25 Berthon and Pitt, ‘Brands, Truthiness and Post-fact’.

26 Danielle K. Citron and Robert Chesney, ‘Deep Fakes: A Looming Crisis for National Security, Democracy and Privacy?’, *Lawfare* (2018). [Accessed 15 May 2020]; Bobby Chesney and Danielle Citron, ‘Deep Fakes: A Looming Challenge for Privacy, Democracy, and National Security’, *California Law Review* 107 (2019): 1753. [Accessed 15 May 2020]; Kietzmann, Jan, Linda W. Lee, Ian P. McCarthy, and Tim C. Kietzmann, ‘Deepfakes: Trick or Treat?’, *Business Horizons* 63, N° 2 (2020): 135–46.

reputation and personal life of an innocent person. Fourth, deepfakes might have the potential to spark international conflict in an unprecedented way. A leader does not actually have to say anything threatening to spur controversy that can lead to a violent confrontation or even a combat situation. All that is required is that a sufficient number of people on one side simply believe that the opposing leader said what the images and sound in the deepfake video suggest.

Searching the Literature

Key Terms, Sample and Data Source

The keywords ‘fake news’, ‘post-truth’, ‘post-fact’, ‘truthiness’, ‘deep fakes/deepfakes’ were used to perform a search of relevant scholarly contributions. The data source included documents indexed in the Web of Science database. This initial search resulted in 1119 documents, which were further filtered to include only academic articles [editorials, book reviews, and commentaries were excluded]. This refined search led to a final sample of 479 academic articles indexed in the database in the last twenty years.

The first paper related to our search terms was published in 2001, however, the number of papers published on these topics per year never exceeded six until 2017. In that year sixty-one papers were published—a dramatic increase. In 2018, there were 188 papers. By the end of the third quarter of 2019, 243 papers had already been published.

The top ten most cited papers returned by Web of Science related to one or more of the search terms as shown in Table 1 below. The two most cited papers are the article ‘Social Media and ‘fake news’ in the 2016 Election’ by Hunt Allcott and Matthew Gentzkow published in *Journal of Economic Perspectives* in 2017,²⁷ followed by Geoffrey Baym’s ‘The Daily Show: Discursive Integration and the Reinvention of Political Journalism’ published in *Political Communication* in 2005.²⁸ The outlets within which discourse on ‘fake news’ is taking place are diverse, with no journals being duplicated for the top ten most cited papers. *Digital Journalism*, *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, and the *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition* round out the journals with the top five most cited papers.

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²⁷ Allcott and Gentzkow, ‘Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election’.

²⁸ Geoffrey Baym, ‘The Daily Show: Discursive Integration and the Reinvention of Political Journalism’, *Political Communication* 22, N° 3 (2005): 259–76.

Paper	Citations
Allcott, H., & Gentzkow, M. 'Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election', <i>Journal of Economic Perspectives</i> 31, N° 2 (2017): 211–36.	309
Baym, G., 'The Daily Show: Discursive Integration and the Reinvention of Political Journalism', <i>Political Communication</i> 22, N° 3 (2005): 259–76.	204
Tandoc Jr, E. C., Lim, Z. W., & Ling, R., 'Defining "Fake News": A Typology of Scholarly Definitions' <i>Digital Journalism</i> 6, N° 2 (2018): 137–53.	83
Naryaez, D., 'Moral Complexity: The Fatal Attraction of Truthiness and the Importance of Mature Moral Functioning', <i>Perspectives on Psychological Science</i> 5, N° 2 (2010): 163–81.	80
Lewandowsky, S., Ecker, U. K., & Cook, J., 'Beyond Misinformation: Understanding and Coping with the "Post-truth" Era', <i>Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition</i> 6, N° 4 (2017): 353–69.	73
Abdel-Basset, M., & Mohamed, M., 'The Role of Single Valued Neutrosophic Sets and Rough Sets in Smart City: Imperfect and Incomplete Information Systems' <i>Measurement</i> 124 (2018): 47–55.	47
Khaldarova, I., & Pantti, M., 'Fake News: The Narrative Battle Over the Ukrainian Conflict', <i>Journalism Practice</i> 10, N° 7 (2016): 891–901.	37
Mihailidis, P., & Viotty, S., 'Spreadable Spectacle in Digital Culture: Civic Expression, Fake News, and the Role of Media Literacies in "Post-fact" Society', <i>American Behavioral Scientist</i> 61, N° 4 (2017): 441–54.	36
Speed, E., & Mannion, R., 'The Rise of Post-truth Populism in Pluralist Liberal Democracies: Challenges for Health Policy', <i>International Journal of Health Policy and Management</i> 6, N° 5 (2017): 249.	32
Newman, E. J., Garry, M., Bernstein, D. M., Kantner, J., & Lindsay, D. S., 'Nonprobative Photographs (or Words) Inflate Truthiness', <i>Psychonomic Bulletin & Review</i> 19, N° 5 (2012): 969–74.	31

Table 1. Ten most cited papers using the search terms in Web of Science as of October 2019

Bibliographic Analysis

The list of papers returned by Web of Science was analysed using VOSViewer, a bibliographic analysis software developed at the University of Leiden, Netherlands.²⁹ While there are other methods available to conduct such analysis (e.g. SciMAT, Bibliometrix), the VOSViewer software is freely available to researchers and easily constructs powerful, visual maps that can aid interpretation and insight into diverse literatures. Furthermore, we chose VOSViewer over other popular mapping techniques such as Multi-Dimensional Scaling (MDS), as it tends to provide a more accurate representation of the raw bibliometric dataset. MDS suffers from a bias towards network nodes that are located in the centre of a bibliometric map, whereas VOSViewer gives equal importance to nodes regardless of their positions.³⁰ Moreover, there has been a growing number of recent VOSViewer-based bibliographic studies analysing the scholarly discussion taking place in a variety of other domains, including organisational communication and creativity,³¹ public health and infections,³² big data applications,³³ and safety culture.³⁴ We draw on the best practices and techniques used in these studies to optimise the visualisation of the data and our analyses.

The VOSViewer algorithm uses distance-based prioritisation of bibliographic metrics, meaning that the shorter the distance between two entities (e.g. authors, cited journals) on a network map, the more closely related they are to each other. Conversely, entities that are further away from each other on the VOSViewer map are less closely related. VOSViewer also uses different colours for each cluster on its maps, which makes network nodes more easily distinguishable. Where two nodes are directly linked to each other, VOSViewer will connect them with a visible line.

29 Nees Jan Van Eck and Ludo Waltman, 'Software Survey: VOSViewer, a Computer Program for Bibliometric Mapping', *Scientometrics* 84, N° 2 (2010): 523–38.

30 Nees Jan Van Eck, Ludo Waltman, Rommert Dekker and Jan van den Berg, 'A Comparison of Two Techniques for Bibliometric Mapping: Multidimensional Scaling and VOS', *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 61, N° 12 (2010): 2405–16.

31 Smaliukienė, Rasa, and Antanas Survilas, 'Relationship Between Organizational Communication and Creativity: How it Advances in Rigid Structures?', *Creativity Studies* 11, N° 1 (2018): 230–43.

32 Erwin Krauskopf, 'A Bibliometric Analysis of the Journal of Infection and Public Health: 2008–2016', *Journal of Infection and Public Health* 11, N° 2 (2018): 224–29.

33 Seung-Pyo Jun, Hyoung Sun Yoo, and San Choi, 'Ten Years of Research Change Using Google Trends: From the Perspective of Big Data Utilizations and Applications', *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 130 (2018): 69–87.

34 Karolien Van Nunen, Jie Li, Genserik Reniers and Koen Ponnet, 'Bibliometric Analysis of Safety Culture Research', *Safety Science* 108 (2018): 248–58.

The process of data collection from Web of Science and the visualisation of bibliographic networks using VOSViewer allows for a robust analysis of publishing activity. Not only are we able to identify the conversations taking place, we are also able to determine the impact of the authors, institutions, and countries writing about these topics.

We conducted several types of analyses on the body of research using VOSViewer:

- Co-authorship analysis: the greater the number of co-authored papers, the higher the relatedness of authors, institutions, and countries
- Co-occurrence analysis: the greater the number of documents in which two keywords occur together, the higher the relatedness of these keywords
- Citation analysis: the greater the number of times authors, journals, and papers cite each other, the higher the relatedness of these items
- Co-citation analysis: the greater the number of times authors, journals, and papers are cited together, the higher the relatedness of these items

The results from these analyses are presented and discussed in the next section.

Results and Analysis

In this section, we present the results of the VOSViewer analysis of the literature related to the search terms. The literature shows little occurrence of these ‘fake news’ terms before the 2016 American presidential election (see Figure 1). After this event, sharp spikes in the use of the search terms begin to appear, which suggests the proliferation of discourse related to ‘fake news’. We consider authors, author networks, and overall trends in research regarding these topics, and categorise the journals in which they are published in terms of their impact. We also analyse other keywords that appear concurrently with our search terms.

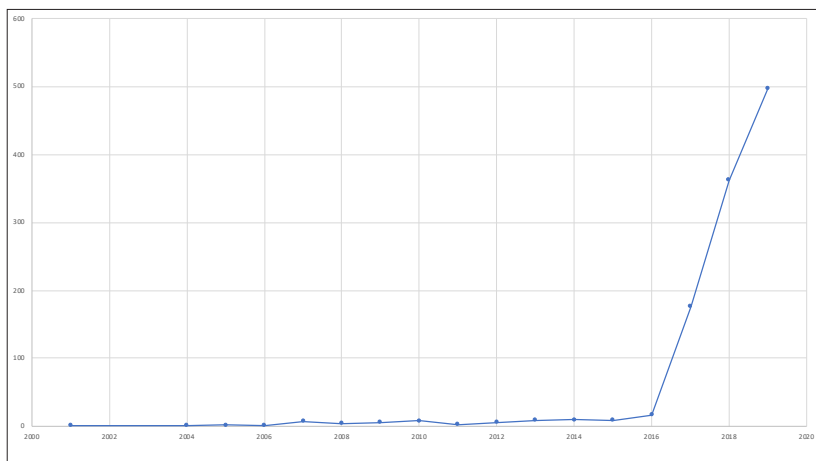


Figure 1. Number of documents feature search terms related only to 'fake news' published – 2001 to October 2019

Co-authorship analysis

In total, 1,023 authors were involved in writing the 479 articles that comprised the Web of Science results related to 'fake news', 'truthiness', 'post-fact', and 'deepfakes'. To produce a more meaningful map of co-authorship, we set the minimum number of papers published by an author to three, and nine authors met this threshold. We choose these thresholds drawing on other bibliographic studies that typically use cut-offs of up to ten authors (or papers or citations), to improve the visualisation of large datasets.³⁵ The resulting map of co-authorship for these nine authors is shown in Figure 2. There are two distinct networks of authors who write on this topic, the most prominent of which is a network between psychologists Daniel Bernstein (Department of Psychology, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, Canada), Maryanne Garry (School of Psychology, University of Waikato, New Zealand), Steve Lindsay (Department of Psychology, University of Victoria, Canada), and Eryn Newman (School of Psychology, Australian National University, Australia).

35 David E. Polley, 'Visualizing the Topical Coverage of an Institutional Repository with VOSViewer', *Data Visualization: A Guide to Visual Storytelling for Libraries* 111 (2016); Chunlei Ye, 'Bibliometrical Analysis of International Big Data Research: Based on Citespace and VOSViewer', in 2018 14th International Conference on Natural Computation, Fuzzy Systems and Knowledge Discovery (ICNC-FSKD), 927–32. IEEE, 2018; Syed Hamad Hassan Shah, Shen Lei, Muhammad Ali, Dmitrii Doronin, and Syed Talib Hussain, 'Presumption: Bibliometric Analysis Using HistCite and VOSViewer', *Kybernetes* (2019): 1020–45.



Figure 2. Map of co-authorship (Generated by VOSviewer)

There are 559 universities from around the world that have researchers publishing work related to ‘fake news’. Again, we set the minimum number of documents published per institution to five, and eleven institutions met this threshold. There is one large cluster of universities that co-publishes—Harvard University, the University of Sydney, Deakin University, Nanyang Technological University, and the University of Oxford.

This indicates significant international collaboration on ‘fake news’ research. Table 2 lists the top six countries by number of papers published on ‘fake news’, and includes the total number of citations per paper that each of these countries has received in Web of Science journals. Scholars from the USA, England, and Australia account for the greatest number of papers, whereas scholars from the USA, England, and Canada account for the greatest number of citations per paper.

Country	Documents	Citations	Citations Per Paper
USA	212	1400	6.60
England	52	216	4.15
Australia	37	130	3.51
Canada	36	128	3.56
Germany	25	78	3.12
Spain	22	26	1.18

Table 2. Top published countries by number of papers as of October 2019

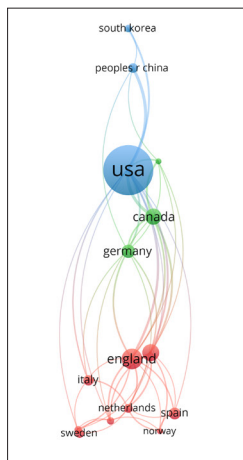


Figure 3. Map of co-authoring countries (Generated by VOSviewer)

As can be seen from Figure 3 there is one major cluster of countries whose scholars work together on research related to ‘fake news’. We used a cut-off of seven documents published per country and out of sixty-five countries included in our sample, sixteen met this threshold. It should be noted that the size of the nodes represents the number of documents published by that country, for example, the USA is the largest node as it is the country with the greatest number of published papers in our sample. This cluster, when analysed further, comprises three smaller networks of countries who work together. The most prominent network consists of scholars from the USA, China, and South Korea. The large network at the bottom in red consists of countries such as Australia, England and Spain. The intermediary green network consisting of Germany, Canada, and New Zealand links the top and bottom networks.

Co-occurrence Analysis

Co-occurrence analysis involves assessing the number of documents in which two terms or words are found together. VOSViewer aggregates co-occurrences of both author keywords and all other keywords, showing their frequency and relatedness. It does not count common functional words such as pronouns, articles, and prepositions. For this analysis, we employed a threshold of ten documents in which a keyword had to appear for it to be included; this resulted in thirty-three keywords. Table 3 lists the ten most commonly occurring keywords that appeared in our sample of 479 papers from the Web of Science database. The top five most common keywords ranked by number of occurrences are ‘fake news’, ‘social media’, ‘misinformation’, ‘media’, and ‘information’.

There are four major keyword clusters concerning media, audience reactions, communication, and conceptual lenses that appear in our literature sample. Figure 4 maps these clusters in terms of how individual words co-occur, and also depicts the links between keywords and clusters. First, the terms other than ‘fake news’ are media-related and shown in green—‘misinformation’, ‘disinformation’, ‘propaganda’, ‘continued influence’, ‘information literacy’, and ‘media literacy’.

Keyword	Number of Occurrencesw
‘Fake News’	225
Social Media	95
Misinformation	68
Media	59
Information	33
Policies	29
Internet	28
Disinformation	28
Journalism	28
News	25

Table 3. Most commonly occurring keywords as of Oct. 2019

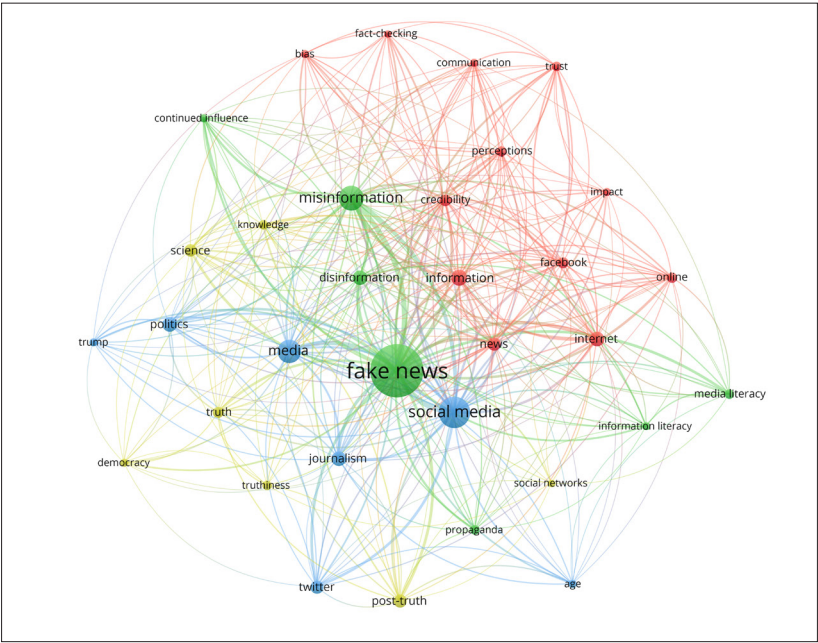


Figure 4. Map of co-occurrence of keywords (Created by VOSviewer)

Second, the keywords that are shown in red describe audience reactions including psychological attributes—‘perceptions’, ‘trust’, ‘bias’, and ‘credibility’—and behaviours —‘fact-checking’ and ‘communication’. Third, the terms, other than ‘post-truth’ and ‘truthiness’, that are shown in blue, illustrate elements of communication practice—‘politics’, ‘journalism’, ‘media’, and ‘social media’. Fourth, the terms that are shown in yellow describe conceptual lenses—‘social networks’, ‘science’, ‘truth’, ‘democracy’, and ‘knowledge’.

Furthermore, authors supply keywords to publishers that they perceive best describe their research. Using VOSViewer, we conducted an analysis of author-supplied keywords and again used ten documents as the threshold to limit our map to the most frequently-appearing terms. This resulted in fifteen keywords (see Figure 5). Once again, ‘fake news’, ‘post-truth’ and ‘truthiness’ appear, as they were contained in our search terms; however, ‘deepfakes’ does not, most likely because this is a relatively new term. Other terms appear to mirror the results described in the last paragraph.

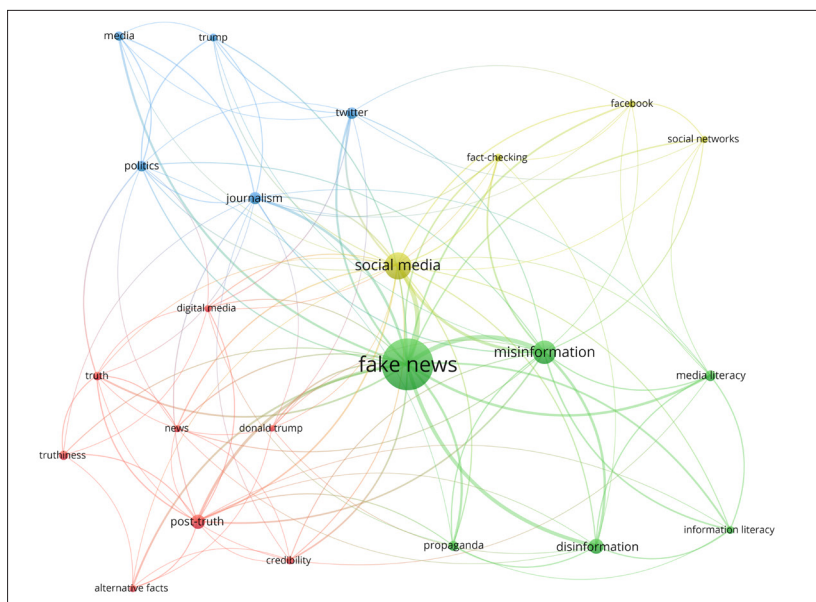


Figure 5. Map of co-occurrence of author keywords (Created by VOSviewer)

Citation Analysis

Citation analysis is based on the relatedness of items, such as authors and journals, where relatedness is determined by the number of times they cite each other. The citation analysis also includes sources outside the database that appear in the papers in our dataset. Our first citation analysis was concerned with the papers in the sample: Which papers in the field of ‘fake news’ cite each other? We required that a paper be cited at least fifteen times. Twenty-eight papers met this threshold; however, only fifteen of these papers cited other papers included in our dataset. Figure 6 reveals a noteworthy observation: Geoffrey Baym’s paper, published in 2015, about the Daily Show³⁶ is the key paper that links the entire network; it makes a connection between other significant articles such as Hunt Allcott’s 2107³⁷ paper about the US presidential election, as well as Irina Khaldarova’s and Mervi Pantti’s 2016 paper about Ukraine.³⁸

The second citation analysis was concerned with cited journals; a journal had to be cited at least five times to be included in the map. Thirteen journals met this criterion and of these, twelve formed a network in which one or more journals cited each other at least once.

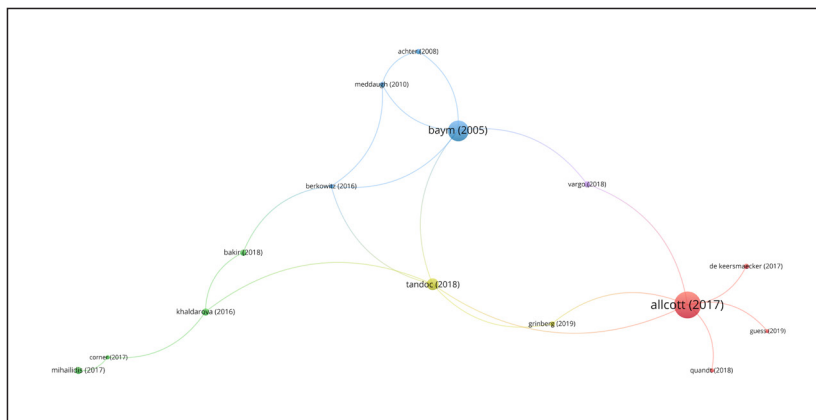


Figure 6. Map of citations by paper (Created by VOSviewer)

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36 Baym, ‘The Daily Show’.

37 Allcott and Gentzkow, ‘Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election’.

38 Irina Khaldarova and Mervi Pantti, ‘Fake News: The Narrative Battle over the Ukrainian Conflict’, *Journalism Practice* 10, N° 7 (2016): 891–901.

This network map is shown in Figure 7 below, demonstrating that two main clusters of journals cite each other. The two clusters on the left (red and green) are the dominant clusters; they include journals such as *American Behavioral Scientist*, *International Journal of Communication*, and *Digital Journalism*. Another smaller network exists on the periphery (blue), and includes *Journalism Practice* and *Journal of American Folklore*. *Digital Journalism* is one of several publications that link these two networks.

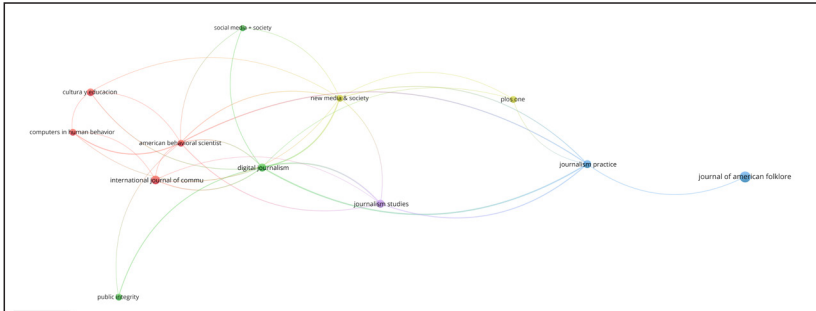


Figure 7. Map of citations by journal (Created by VOSviewer)

Finally, we explored citation networks of authors based on how often they cite each other. We required a minimum of fifty citations per author but did not place any constraints on the minimum number of documents each author published. Thirteen authors met this criterion. Nine of these authors comprised a meaningful citation network, which is shown in Figure 8 below. Edson C. Tandoc Jr at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore is a prominent author who serves as a key link between other clusters that include scholars such as Hunt Allcott, Richard Ling, Geoffrey Baym, John Cool, and Ullrich K. H. Ecker.

Co-citation Analysis

Co-citation analysis explores how closely items such as authors, journals, and papers are cited together. This type of analysis provides insight into the degree to which they have shaped and influenced the academic conversations about our field of interest. The co-citation analysis is not restricted to items occurring in the sample. We began the co-citation analysis by looking at all the references cited in the 479 papers in our dataset. We constrained our network map by requiring that a reference be cited at least twenty times; ten references met this criterion.

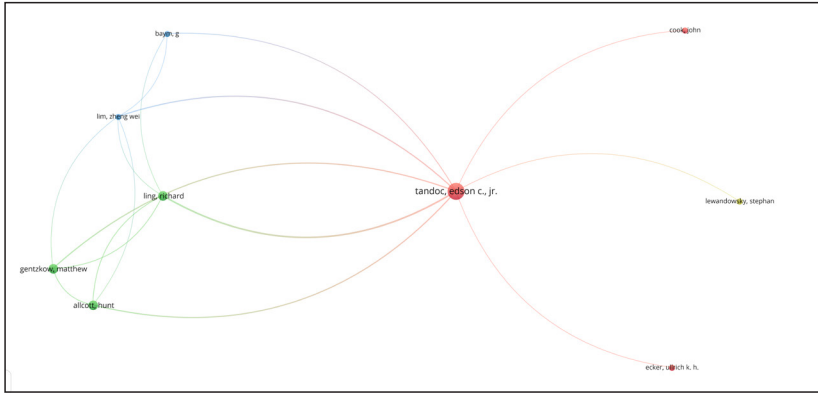


Figure 8. Map of citations by author (Created by VOSviewer)

The top three most cited papers were Allcott (2017),³⁹ Vosoughi et al. (2018),⁴⁰ and Tandoc et al. (2018).⁴¹ The other papers that comprise the 10 most influential references are shown in Figure 9. They appear to be uniformly linked, with no single node being disproportionately influential in terms of number of citations, perhaps with the exception of Allcott (2017).⁴² All linkage distances between nodes are relatively equal.

We then conducted the same co-citation analysis on all journals cited in our dataset, identifying 11,433 different sources (journals and other publication outlets). Again, to filter the result, we set a threshold of fifty citations per journal, which reduced the total number of eligible sources in our network map to twenty-nine. Some of the most highly cited academic journals in the resultant sample include (number of citations in parentheses): *Science* (174), *Journal of Communication* (165), *Digital Journalism* (148), *New Media & Society* (127), and *PLOS One* (115). The network map of journals is provided in Figure 10. There is a large cluster of non-academic publishing outlets to the right, in green, made up mostly of newspaper sources such as *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*.

39 Allcott and Gentzkow, 'Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election'.

40 Vosoughi et al., 'The Spread of True and False News Online'.

41 Tandoc et al., 'Defining Fake News: A Typology of Scholarly Definitions'.

42 Allcott and Gentzkow.

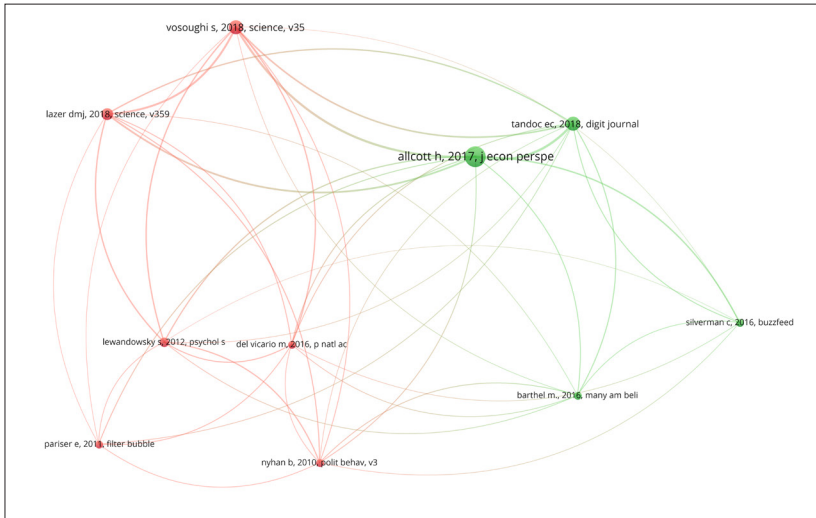


Figure 9. Map of co-citations by reference (Created by VOSviewer)

The other two major clusters on the left, in blue and red, are comprised primarily of academic journals, which include the aforementioned highly cited journals as well as other sources such as *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, *American Behavioral Scientist*, *Computers in Human Behavior*, *American Journal of Political Science and Information*, and *Communication & Society*.

We concluded our co-citation study by analysing all authors cited in the 479 papers. This analysis revealed 14,211 total citations. We set a threshold of 30 citations per author, which resulted in fifteen authors being eligible for our co-citation network map. The top five most cited authors were Hunt Allcott (111 citations), Craig Silverman (89), Edson C. Tandoc Jr (72), Stephan Lewandowsky (69) and Soroush Vosoughi (67). It is interesting to note that many of the same authors continue to appear in the various bibliographic analyses we have conducted so far. This suggests that, in this relatively young field of research related to ‘fake news’, article output seems to revolve around a small set of scholars, though this is likely to expand as the topic continues to gain in reach and prominence. The co-citation network map of authors is shown in Figure 11. Craig Silverman, Hunt Allcott, and Soroush Vosoughi are firmly in the centre, linking tangentially co-cited authors such as Cass R. Sunstein and Lucas Graves.

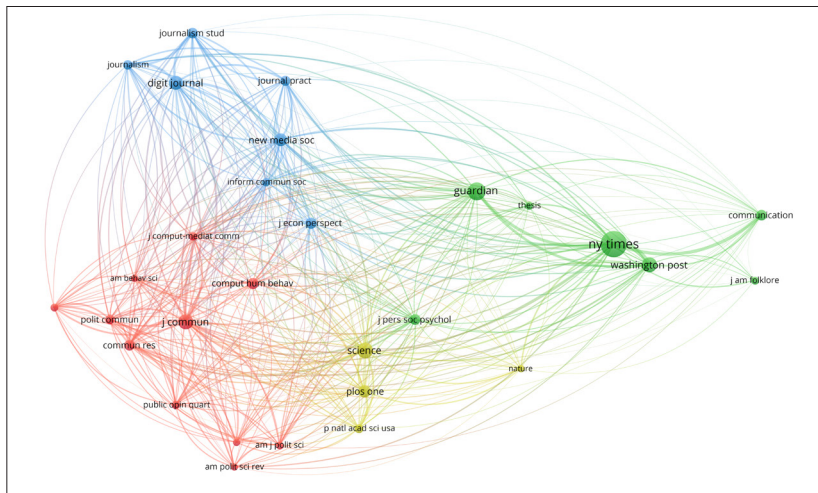


Figure 10. Map of co-citations by source (Created by VOSviewer)

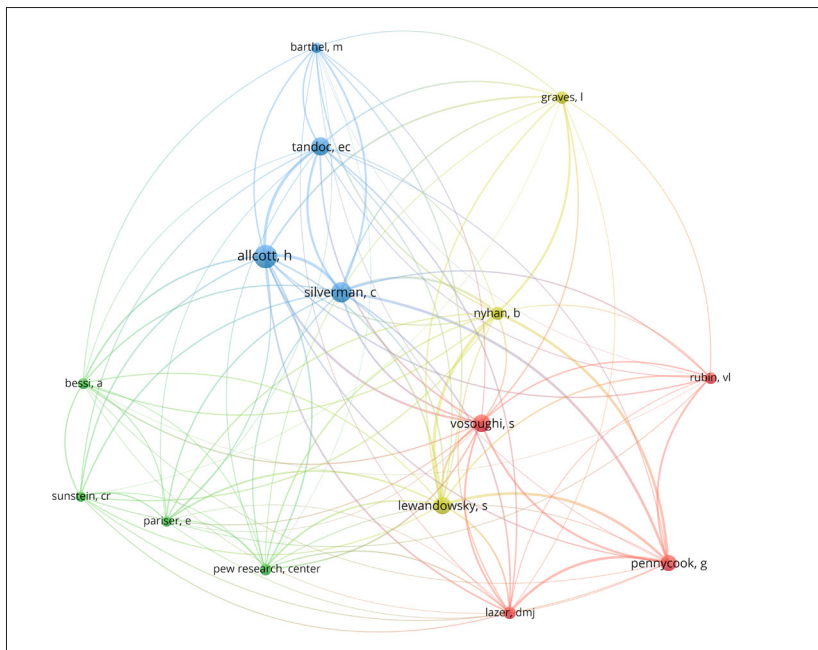


Figure 11. Map of co-citations by author (Created by VOSviewer)

General Discussion

This paper explores and maps the current state of research on ‘fake news’, ‘truthiness’, ‘post-fact’, and ‘deepfakes’ using a bibliographic mapping software called VOSViewer. Our dataset consisted of articles on these topics that appear in journals indexed on the Web of Science database. The VOSViewer software allows for analysis and insights that would be very difficult or impractical to obtain using other literature content analysis tools or by manually coding the papers. The number of papers published on these themes has increased substantially since 2017, which is not surprising given the topical nature of this area of study. In general, the results suggest that the conversation on ‘fake news’ is largely dominated by a select group of authors, several of whom are prolific in that they have successfully published large numbers of articles, and by several others who are influential as evidenced by how often they are cited.

Scholars from the USA, England, Australia, and Canada produce the highest volume of articles related to ‘fake news’, and their articles also receive the greatest number of citations. The USA is disproportionately represented in this select group. With respect to the universities whose scholars write on this topic, a strong cluster of institutions including Harvard University and the University of Sydney tend to co-author papers. When we expand our citation analyses to include authors and journals not included in our dataset, we still see that authors from our sample are among the most influential—Geoffrey Baym (Klein College of Media and Communication, Temple University, USA) and Hunt Allcott (Department of Economics, New York University, USA). Although possibly prejudiced by our English-only publication sample, this suggests that the academic conversation on ‘fake news’ is still relatively emergent and a group of core authors publish and are cited disproportionately on the subject.

The Faces of ‘Fake News’: Implications for Future Research

The bibliometric analysis presented in this paper identifies significant research interest in ‘fake news’ across several social science disciplines, specifically concerning mis-information and dis-information. However, outside of this mis- or dis-information dichotomy, a broad concept of ‘fake news’ needs to include other falsehood-creating practices that strategic communicators face, including mal-information and non-information. Our analysis revealed that these latter two falsehood practices have been subjected to limited critical scrutiny in the existing literature. Thus, in order to fully appreciate the complexity of

‘fake news’ phenomena, we must first understand the conceptual foundations of the construct.

We deconstruct ‘fake news’ into two dimensions that describe the intention to deceive and the intention to harm. The ‘intention to deceive’ is defined by the motivation to change or reinforce audiences’ affective, behavioural, and cognitive responses by creating content that promotes falsehoods and non-factual information to achieve political, ideological, financial, or other goals.⁴³ However, not all ‘fake news’ content has the intent to deceive as some content (also) has an intent to harm. ‘Fake news’ content that has the ‘intention to harm’ either the audience or the subject of the content may be driven by competitive, political, ideological, or other differences.⁴⁴

Using these two dimensions and insights gleaned from the ‘fake news’ literature, we propose a practical conceptual framework to describe four different types of ‘fake news’ practices—the practices of mis-information, dis-information, mal-information, and non-information (see Figure 12). When ‘fake news’ has a low intention to harm and to deceive, this content is ‘mis-information’—inaccurate, false information that is the result of honest mistakes or of negligence.⁴⁵

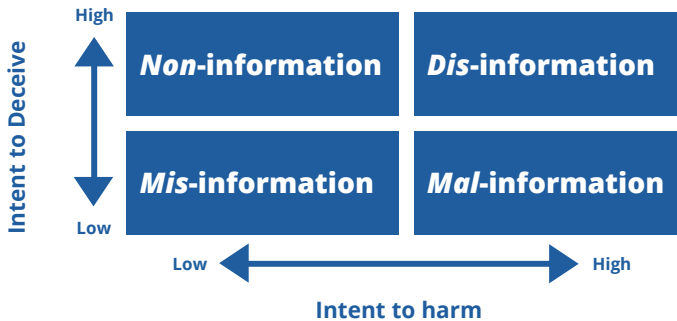


Figure 12. The faces of ‘fake news’

43 Lazer et al., ‘The Science of Fake News’; Jeannette Paschen, ‘Investigating the Emotional Appeal of Fake News Using Artificial Intelligence and Human Contributions’, *Journal of Product & Brand Management* (2019): 223–33; Andrew Flostrand, Leyland Pitt, and Jan Kietzmann, ‘Fake News and Brand Management: A Delphi Study of Impact, Vulnerability and Mitigation’, *Journal of Product & Brand Management* (2019): 246–54.

44 Flostrand et al., ‘Fake news and Brand Management’; Anouk De Regt, Matteo Montecchi, and Sarah Lord Ferguson, ‘A False Image of Health: How Fake News and Pseudo-facts Spread in the Health and Beauty Industry’, *Journal of Product & Brand Management* (2019): 168–79; Michail Vafeiadis, Denise S. Bortree, Christen Buckley, Prati Diddi, and Anli Xiao, ‘Refuting Fake News’ on Social Media: Nonprofits, Crisis Response Strategies and Issue Involvement’, *Journal of Product & Brand Management* 29, No. 2 (2019): 209–22.

45 Justin Hendrix, and David Carroll, ‘Confronting a Nightmare for Democracy: Personal Data, Personalized Media and Weaponized Propaganda’, *Medium*, 4 May 2017. [Accessed 15 May 2020]; Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan, *Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy Making*, Council of Europe Report 27 (2017). [Accessed 15 May 2020]; McManus and Michaud, ‘Never Mind the Buzzwords’.

For example, during recent terror events in London and France, some social media users created and shared unconfirmed rumours about the identity of the perpetrators and their motives without the intention to harm or deceive.

Where there is an intention to harm but not to deceive, ‘fake news’ content is classified as ‘mal-information’—reality-based information used to inflict harm on a person, organisation, country, or another group.⁴⁶ Consider for instance the actions of anti-Hillary groups during the last US presidential elections. Hilary Clinton was the subject of several leaks involving the mismanagement of classified information during her time as Secretary of State. While the actual content of the news was factually correct, the timing and circumstances of the release indicated an attempt to undermine her credibility and her suitability for presidential candidacy.

Where the intention to deceive is high and the intention to harm is also high, ‘fake news’ content can be called ‘dis-information’—the manipulation of information that purposefully aims to mislead and misinform.⁴⁷ A falsified article that appeared on the now closed WTOE5 News, and was shared more than 960,000 times, stated that the Pope had endorsed Donald Trump’s candidacy for US president.⁴⁸

Finally, where there is a high intention to deceive but a low intention to cause harm, ‘fake news’ can be classified as ‘non-information’—irrelevant information that obfuscates, hides or covers real or true information sought by audiences.⁴⁹ For example, consider a government agency that needs to legally reveal an uncomfortable truth in a public report. That agency could practice non-information by inserting irrelevant detail into the report to mislead or cover-up uncomfortable real or true findings or information.

While academics have researched ‘fake news’ broadly with a specific interest in dis-information and mis-information, as the co-occurrence analysis indicates, other key aspects of ‘fake news’ are less prominent, including mal-information, non-information, and deepfake techniques. These faces of ‘fake news’ are

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46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 Penny Marshall, ‘What is Fake News, What Are the Worst Examples and Why Does It Matter?’, *Independent TeleVision* (ITV) Service, 18 February 2019. [Accessed 15 May 2020]

49 Yiquan Gu and Tobias Wenzel, ‘Strategic Obfuscation and Consumer Protection Policy’, *The Journal of Industrial Economics* 62, N^o 4 (2014): 632–60; Axel Gelfert, ‘Fake News: A Definition’, *Informal Logic* 38, N^o 1 (2018): 84–117; Ian P. McCarthy, David Hannaha, Leyland F. Pitt, and Jane M. McCarthy, ‘Confronting Indifference Toward Truth: Dealing with Workplace Bullshit’, *Business Horizons* (2020): 253–63.

critically important, both for strategic communications professionals and for public policy officials who wish to develop fully a broad understanding of ‘fake news’ and the practice of creating or publicly spreading falsehoods. For example, the literature offers little insight into the motivations to create or the consequences of mal- or non-information. Thus, we propose promising areas of future research interest in Table 4 under the four clusters identified by the keyword analysis.

Research theme	Related questions for future research
<i>Mal-information</i>	
Expressions of ‘fake news’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Using research on mis-information and dis-information, how to effectively and efficiently identify mal-information in the media? ● How to develop media literacy programmes to combat the threats of mal-information directed towards vulnerable audiences?
Audience reactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What behaviours protect against the threat of mal-information? ● What are the psychological consequences of sharing mal-information accidentally?
Conceptual lenses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How can the intent to harm be incorporated into existing theories and conceptual frameworks?
Communication practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What regulations or ethical practice rules should be developed to control mal-information?
<i>Non-information</i>	
Expressions of ‘fake news’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How are non-information practices correlated with other ‘fake news’ practices?
Audience reactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How can audiences cope with non-information strategies and detect honest information?

Conceptual lenses	● How can understandings of deception intentions help conceptualise the impact on target audiences and other stakeholders?
Communication practice	● To what extent can interventions prevent non-information practices from interfering with strategic communications objectives?
<i>'Deepfakes'</i>	
Expressions of 'fake news'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How does the rise of highly convincing audio-visual 'deepfake' techniques impact the different faces of 'fake news'? ● What is the role of other methods of creating 'fake news' when deepfakes can create near perfect falsehoods?
Audience reactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How will audiences react when 'fake news' content is pervasive and indiscriminate from real news? ● What is the role of media relationships when content can be synthetically produced using 'deepfake' techniques?
Conceptual lenses	● What are the implications of artificial intelligence technology that enables 'fake news' production and sharing?
Communication practice	● How can communication professionals mitigate and anticipate the effects of 'fake news' utilising 'deepfake' techniques?

Table 4: Future 'Fake News' Research Directions for Strategic Communications

Conclusions

The results of the bibliometric analysis indicate where academic research on 'fake news' takes place, as well as which authors or groups of authors are influential and important to reference when conducting new studies on 'fake news'. Furthermore, for strategic communications researchers, the findings above provide a clear map of not just the evolution of this emerging field, but also of the most important topics that have been subjected to peer-reviewed critical scrutiny.

As with most research, this paper has limitations. We have relied primarily on the Web of Science database to produce the raw bibliographic data that served as the input for our VOSViewer analyses. Any errors with respect to publication volumes, citation volumes and potential misattributions of authorship could have resulted in occasionally flawed results, particularly when such a large volume of data from 479 papers was used in the VOSViewer analysis. We did spot-check many data points for accuracy and did not find any errors; however, this heavy reliance on the Web of Science database should be considered when reviewing the results. It should also be noted that there are many credible journals that are not included in the Web of Science service, and these were, by definition, not used in our analysis. Furthermore, follow-up studies that use different indices, include more languages or utilise other search terms could provide additional insight into the evolution of ‘fake news’ concepts that could be added to and compared with the findings reported above.

If the trends identified in this literature review persist, ‘fake news’ and the related terms will continue to be important issues in a wide range of academic disciplines, including politics and international relations, journalism and communications, business and management, and the social sciences in general. It will be interesting to see how the academic conversation on ‘fake news’ evolves over time. A fundamental prerequisite for any research effort on such a dynamic and evolving topic is a map of the extant literature. Strategic communications scholars, practitioners, and policy makers can benefit from this bibliographic review as it speaks to the direction in which the conversation surrounding this topic is headed. Authors, reviewers, and journal editors alike can benefit from the map that a bibliographic review provides in thinking about their future work, the value of that work, and the tangents that journals might follow.

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UNDER THE SECURITY UMBRELLA: JAPAN'S WEAK STORYTELLING TO THE WORLD

A Review Essay by Nancy Snow

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Keywords—*US-Japan relations, US-Japan Security Alliance, strategic communication, strategic communications, national identity*

About the Author

Dr Nancy Snow is Pax Mundi Professor of Public Diplomacy, Kyoto University of Foreign Studies and 2020 Walt Disney Chair in Global Media and Communications, Schwarzman College, Tsinghua University. Like Sheila A. Smith, Snow was an Abe Fellow at Keio University where she researched Japan's public diplomacy after 3/11 and published *Japan's Information War* (English and Japanese versions).

A Country with Diminished Marginal Returns

‘Japan is understudied, undervalued, and underappreciated in the analysis and conduct of international relations.’¹ Brad Glosserman’s opening sentence in his book, *Peak Japan*, could not be any more obvious for those of us who reside in Japan, or any more true as it applies to the Japan of this century and specifically 2020.

Why the weak strategic communications in a year that began with so much auspicious global publicity for Japan? 2020 was to be the year of the Summer Olympics in Tokyo, the country’s big reveal to the world nine years after suffering the triple disaster—earthquake, tsunami, and Fukushima meltdown—known as 3/11.

It was preceded by a successful run of global persuasion events in 2019, from the seamless abdication of the Chrysanthemum Throne by Emperor Akihito that marked the end of the Heisei era to the ascension of his son, Emperor Naruhito. Japan’s Foreign Ministry provided an English translation of the new era, Reiwa, as ‘beautiful harmony’, despite more common meanings of ‘Rei’ (令) in modern Chinese and Japanese as ‘command’ or ‘order’. This was also the first Japanese era naming from which the characters were drawn exclusively from Japanese classical literature; in the past, era naming was drawn from classical Chinese literature. The smooth Reiwa transition was followed in June 2019 by Japan’s turn hosting the G20 Summit in Osaka, just three years after Prime Minister Abe convened the G7 Ise-Shimla Summit in May 2016.

What could have been Japan’s and Abe’s leadership moment in the spotlight was overshadowed by American presidents. Obama’s speech at Hiroshima in 2016 was instantly translated into Japanese and became a bestseller in a country whose national identity is intertwined with its relations with another country. At the G20 Summit in Osaka, the Japanese government and foreign affairs ministry relinquished its hoped-for global leadership reins by acquiescing to the American president and the senior advisers he had in tow, daughter Ivanka Trump and son-in-law Jared ‘making the peace process in the Middle East great again’ Kushner. It looked as if the G20 were taking place in Washington and the people of Osaka were all but banned from the members-only venue.

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¹ Glosserman, *Peak Japan*, p. 1.

For Japan, like the rest of the world, 2021 cannot come fast enough. This year's 3/11 coincided with the World Health Organization's announcement of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Japan's weaknesses are on display in glaring detail, beginning with the wide conversational gap between Japan and the English-language global media. Outside of the Japanese diplomatic community, an English-speaking government spokesperson who can carry on a live television interview with a foreign reporter is rare. Tomohiko Taniguchi, Abe's spokesman and speechwriter, and diplomat Noriyuki Shikata, former director of the Office of Global Communications, are two prominent communicators of Japan's international messaging. In the COVID-19 era, Tokyo Metropolitan Governor Yuriko Koike, with her broadcast journalism background and overseas education, has earned higher marks than Abe for holding press briefings in English. At the highest levels of government, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is unable to carry on a conversation in English. This is not to dismiss the point that there is a predominant Americanisation or Englishisation of international relations, which in some academic circles counts as a form of cultural imperialism.

Hegemonic or not, Japan needs more English speakers. It was once all so different and promising. At the time of Akio Morita's death in 1999, *The Washington Post* described his life as equal parts cultural diplomat and company CEO: 'Garrulous and fluent in English, he traveled abroad extensively and counted as friends such people as the late conductor Leonard Bernstein and Katharine Graham, chairman of the executive committee of The Washington Post Co.; US ambassadors were guests at his home in Tokyo.' Morita, like UN High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata, transcended their nationality. They were global citizens, with Morita playing the role of master conductor. In his autobiography, *Made in Japan*, he writes: 'Our plan is to lead the public with new products rather than ask them what kind of products they want.'

Glosserman's astute observation would be an unimaginable statement in the 1980s. The United States reeducated Japan after its defeat in World War II and, by the 1980s, it felt like the most studious pupil in democratic capitalism had outgrown its instructor. The fear then was that Japan, Inc. would overtake America, Inc., long before there was any concern about a rising China. Not only was Japan's binge buying of cultural landmarks in Hollywood and Manhattan threatening American soft power, but also Japan, with its growing economic power, was being perceived in Washington less as employee and more as carpetbagger.

Japan's prowess was paradoxically fascinating and disconcerting in its challenge to the US and to the West, warranting a global interest that it cannot hold today. Imagine a country whose real estate speculation became so 'Wild West' legendary that the land below the Imperial Palace in Tokyo was once said to have higher speculative value than the entire state of California. Shintaro Ishihara's 1989 bestselling book (co-authored with Sony's Morita), *The Japan That Can Say No: Why Japan Will Be First Among Equals*, was translated into English in 1991 for an American audience. It was Japan's last hurrah before things began to go in a southerly direction. In it, the future Tokyo Metropolitan Governor (1999–2012) spelled out a common sentiment among rightwing conservatives—Japan follows no one: not the United States in the 1990s, and not, by extension, China today. It called for a strong and independent military separate from the United States. Ishihara's charismatic prognostications aside, none of this bore out. Japan's dutiful economy continued to make products that over time were much more cheaply manufactured elsewhere throughout Asia.

Japan was doing exactly what it was forced to do under occupation (1945–52) with the creation of the toothless Japan Self-Defense Forces. With an imposed orientation toward non-intervention and a total focus on rebuilding its economy, Japan received add-on 'gifts from heaven'—American reforms that gave women the right to vote, broke up feudalistic landlord control of rural areas, and strengthened labor unions. Likewise, the victorious US reeducated Germany from its fascist past and, although Germany continues to host US troops, its political leadership is unquestioned, while Japan by comparison is politically-stunted. Germany is acknowledged as the leading state of a weakened EU. Japan has no comparable regional position, certainly not in East Asia, where neighbourly political economic relations go hot and cold, bitter histories pervade the atmosphere, and China casts a long military and maritime shadow.

The Japanese economy was once projected to overtake the US economy by 2000. As late as 1990, books still abounded about how to be more like the Japanese in business management. To spur growth, US companies needed to adapt their workers to the Toyota Way or the Honda Way of *weigela*, a made-up Japanese word loosely translated as hubbub or chatter, to signify the chaotic communication and disagreement buzz that leads to continued improvement on the production line. Akio Morita's 1986 biography *Made in Japan: Akio Morita and Sony*, became an international bestseller and was translated into twelve languages. Morita wrote, 'I believe there is a bright future ahead for mankind, and that future

holds exciting technological advances that will enrich the lives of everybody on the planet. Only by expanding world trade and stimulating more production can we take advantage of the possibilities that lie before us. We in the free world can do great things. We proved it in Japan by changing the image of the words 'Made in Japan' from something shoddy to something fine.' A nearly fifty-year trajectory of growth was all but gone by the lost decade of the 1990s. All that is left of Ishihara's and Morita's vision is a stagnant economy, a declining and aging population, a weakened higher education system that struggles to keep up with its upstart authoritarian neighbouring state, and nonsensical nationalism.

In my talks on Japan as a nation-brand, I show a photo of Morita on the May 1971 cover of *Time* magazine with the heading, 'How to cope with Japan's business invasion', or the *New York Times* Sunday magazine cover from September 1988 showing Morita embracing pop singer Cyndi Lauper with a caption that reads, 'Sony and CBS Records: What a Romance!' The students are nonplussed. I tell them that Morita's Sony and Matsushita's Panasonic were the Apple and Microsoft of their era. Morita said about Sony's success that 'curiosity is the key to creativity'. So where is the curiosity of the young Japanese students I regularly encounter in the classroom? They don't know who directed *Tokyo Story* while their film buff peers outside of Japan do. They are hard pressed to name one Akira Kurosawa film. They are apathetic to Japan's postwar rise in significance—when a nation of pragmatists shifted from imperial war ambitions to manufacturing goods that the world didn't even know it wanted until it was presented with them. We're often told that in life there are only two guarantees, death and taxes. But I tell my Japanese students that there is a third guarantee: The United States and Japan will never go to war against each other. They should not only embrace that guarantee but also be able to explain why Japan-US relations are so important to the rest of the world. It isn't for any military reason. It's an arranged marriage that has outlasted any conventional marriage. As Glosserman points out, Japan's economic success after WWII led to complacency in the present generation of young people, who cling apathetically to Japanese values and comfort foods. I once asked my class: Would you take your dream job if it were located outside your home country? None of the Japanese students said yes while all of the international students said they would. I asked them to tell me why in writing. One Japanese male said that he would worry that he couldn't find ingredients overseas to make Japanese food.

Japan to the World: We Don't Need to Explain

Japan is mostly quiet on the global and Western front. Its weak international relations profile is acknowledged from the chambers of the parliamentary Diet to the high-rise executive suites of advertising giant Dentsu. Government ministers inside the *Gaimusbo* [Ministry of Foreign Affairs] and at the Prime Minister's Office of Global Communications bemoan the taciturn international [*mukuchina kokusai*] reputation Japan has among its economic peers in the G7 and G20 and in intergovernmental organisations like the United Nations. Takashi Inoue, Chairman and CEO of Inoue Public Relations in Tokyo, says that Japan possesses a 'unique communications format due to the impact of its homogeneity and the influence of Confucianism'. Unique. If there were one overused word to describe Japan, unique might be it. The Japanese are unique, the island nation is unique, the culture is unique, the cuisine is unique, the language is unique. Even the four seasons are unique, or so it was explained to me in a PowerPoint presentation designed by a group of Japanese executives who had spent a year studying how to represent Japan to the world. *Nihonjinron* [theories/discussion about Japan and the Japanese] is the name for this cultural nationalism. It is just part of the story as to why Japan suffers so much in explaining its identity to the world.

The other challenge is Japan's sense of superiority in all matters except for its relationship with the United States. As Michal Kolmaš points out in *National Identity and Japanese Revisionism*, a sense of national identity superior to China, Korea, the rest of Asia pervades, just beneath the surface of Japanese *tatemae* [public behaviours and attitudes], commingling with an arrogant aversion to having to explain itself. Japan has always operated in a hierarchical structure, both internally and also in its relations with the outside world. Even the ritual of exchanging *meishi* [name cards] is a rank and order rolodex for the mind. Kolmaš observes that Japan's acceptance of much of Western modernity during the Meiji period paved the way for the country to differentiate itself from what were thought to be backward Asian countries. 'Japanese narratives have tended to portray Asia as inferior to Japan.' With that in mind, it does not take much to understand Prime Minister Abe's focus on becoming the great fixer, making Japan great again—not great 1950s style à la Trump, but more like the Japan that existed before its postwar infantilising security submission to America. Abe's 2012 election campaign slogan was *Nihon wo torimodosu* ['I will recover/regain Japan'] explained in his books, *Toward a New Country* and *Toward a Beautiful*

Country, where he portrays himself as the proverbial man with a plan. But as Brad Glosserman reveals in *Peak Japan*, the country's demographics (126 million and declining) and its Mt Fuji of national debt (270% of GDP, the highest of any developed democracy) forecast driving winds against Japan's first-tier status. It all begins and ends with the Japanese people and their attitudes. Glosserman doubts that the majority of the Japanese people share Abe's, much less the government's, ambition to be a major power player that can stand on its own beside China and the United States. The pacifist mindset built into Japan's 1947 Constitution has pacified the country as a whole. It is hard to imagine tolerance for any normalisation that might involve Japanese troops returning in body bags.

Glosserman is deputy director of and visiting professor at the Tama University Center for Rule-Making Strategies; he served as executive director of the Pacific Forum International in Honolulu for sixteen years. As a senior scholar and Japan watcher, he offers readers a lively discussion on Japan's loss of dynamism. In contrast, Kolmaš is an active and ambitious junior scholar who first visited Japan just twelve years ago. Being Czech, he finds himself in familiar territory when he explores intercultural differences related to national identity. Reading Kolmaš is like participating in a highly interesting Theories of International Relations class. He dissects Abe's vision of a beautiful Japan using theoretical assumptions—constructivist, neo-realist, and post-structuralist—drawn from European debates about security. He offers a refreshing analysis that breathes life into Glosserman's negative prognosis by using national identity as an analytical tool to explain state behaviour, a long-overlooked point of view in political science and international relations. He then goes further to answer questions about how political concepts are socially constructed, more in keeping with gender theory, green theory, and post-structuralism. He even holds up a mirror to Hans Morgenthau, dean of the dominant school of international relations, who, in 1948, wrote in *Politics Among Nations* that 'the kind of interest determining political action in a particular period of history depends on the political and cultural context within which foreign policy is formulated'. Culture and identity—state and individual—determine national interests and socioeconomic wellbeing.

Both Kolmaš and Smith write about Japan's military power, but from very different perches. Kolmaš, assistant professor at the Metropolitan University in Prague, offers a new theoretical approach to Japanese national identity in international relations. Of the three authors, Kolmaš has the most ambition

about moving the needle forward in how global scholars talk about Japan. His scholarship not only serves to advance his career in the academy but also helps a spectrum of stakeholders—from old Japan hands and other non-Japan-hand scholars to curious observers—to understand why Japan continues to find itself unable or unwilling to raise its global profile in diplomacy and security. Specifically, his research poses three main questions: How is national identity constructed and reconstructed? How did Japan's post-war pacifist identity emerge? What influence does the pacifist identity have on Shinzo Abe's contemporary revisionism?

Sheila A. Smith's name is well-known among scholars of Japan. More importantly, she is the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) Senior Fellow for Japan Studies and her recent book, *Japan Rearmed*, was published by Harvard University Press. The Japanese conundrum, heard ad nauseum in security policy circles in Tokyo, is printed on the book sleeve: 'Japan has one of Asia's most technologically advanced militaries and yet struggles to use its hard power as an instrument of national policy.' Smith was an Abe Fellow at Keio University (2007–08) where she researched Japan's foreign policy toward China, and she holds a Ph.D. in political science from Columbia University. She has been a visiting researcher at leading Japanese foreign and security policy think-tanks, including the Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA), a think-tank connected to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Before joining the CFR, Smith was at the East-West Center in Honolulu, Hawaii. This pedigree is important to understanding how detailed and dryly predictable her analysis of Japan's defence policy is. It is shaped, she says, by three principal factors: the US-Japan security alliance, domestic politics, and external threat perceptions.

When Smith says something about Japan, the world pays attention and Japan listens and nods along. This is both an advantage and a disadvantage for Japan's storytelling. An underappreciated Japan gets noticed when Smith publishes, but her prominence brings into sharp focus the fact that Japan cannot produce either an organisation equal in authority to the Council on Foreign Relations or a comparable Japanese native Senior Fellow for American Studies. The reality of Japan's dependency on the United States for its own global messaging is like an anti-cherry blossom phenomenon: it just never dies. Japan is a US ally, but one that does not have equal status with its security benefactor. In fact, and in rank, Japan is the weaker interlocutor. One might consider the position of the US as the spoils of victory going back to World War II, but it's more than that. Japan's

lack of an equivalent influence to Smith means that Japan's narrative about itself does not originate in Tokyo, Okinawa, Sapporo, Osaka, Kyoto, or anywhere else in Japan. It begins and ends in Washington.

Smith's book has 240 pages of text and 72 pages of notes, but her narrative voice is lacking. There is no 'as seen through the eyes of' biographical flourish, nor does she provide much in the way of a theoretical underpinning. This book does not give the Japan-curious much access. As a close Japan watcher for the last eight years, I kept waiting for her expert opinion to rise above the descriptive. It did in a few sections. She pulls back the curtain a bit to reveal how much 'Tokyo 2020' was part of Abe's nostalgic vision for a beautiful Japan and a reconstituted Constitution. Smith writes that, in a video message Abe prepared for his pro-revision supporters in May 2017, 'he linked constitutional revision with the upcoming 2020 Tokyo Olympics, arguing that, just as the 1964 Olympics had been a new beginning for postwar Japan, so too would the 2020 Olympics be a moment of rebirth for the nation'. His plan was to revise the Constitution within a few years of this message. Smith writes:

The Japanese public remains sensitive to the possibility of military action abroad. The SDF [Self-Defence Forces] too have become accustomed to this low-risk conditioning of their overseas deployments. No member of the SDF has died abroad, while Japanese police, diplomats, and aid workers have lost their lives. Should Japan's military be found wanting in response to a dangerous situation abroad, or should the situation end up costing SDF lives, the Japanese will have to decide if they are ready to accept that. If the SDF is to be effective in international military coalitions, it will need to be able to confront risk.²

The risk avoidance conclusion Smith reaches in *Japan Rearmed* is that Japan is ready, it is armed, but it does not accept that the best defence is a good offence.

Prognosticators of Japan's Economy and National Identity

Both Glosserman and Kolmaš present Japan from a perspective much closer to the ground, reminding us that Japan's military is adapting to change—assessing external threats and undertaking the global humanitarian need for more Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) and international assistance operations, such as Japan itself needed post-3/11. But neither author believes that Japan is

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² Smith, *Japan Rearmed*, p. 237.

becoming a ‘normal’ militarist country. Within its cultural DNA is a strong need to remain unique. As Kolmaš reminds us, the Japanese public still matters, even if it is ignored. ‘All of the Japanese security laws in the last few decades were passed despite massive political protests.’³

Glosserman’s assessment of Japan’s national identity, economy, and security is reflected in the title of his book—*Peak Japan: The End of Great Ambitions*. Japan’s ascendancy has peaked. Regardless of headlines overselling Abenomics and womenomics—more pipedream than reality, even at the start—this once first-tier nation is now on the wane. The weakening of the yen has prompted droves of international visitors to flock to Japan, and its soft power appeal in terms of culture and cuisine has never been higher, but beneath the dazzle of its Michelin star restaurants, the structure cannot hold. Whereas Abe should be credited for understanding the power of public relations in political matters (slogans, buzzwords) he forgot rule number one: pigs shouldn’t wear lipstick. After the colour fades, the pig will still be slaughtered. Glosserman is correct in his assessment that the status quo persists despite calls for reform. Habits of rhetoric, ritual, and consensus are hard to break. One need look no further than to the Abe government’s coronavirus communications and its management of the Diamond Princess debacle and postponement of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics.

The Japanese sensibility does not jibe with the current political necessity to ‘brand ideas’ such as the normalisation of Japan’s Constitution. In the 1980s, Akio Morita’s ‘It’s a Sony’ ad campaign helped get the world hooked on Japanese electronics. What happened to that confidence? The three books reviewed here help uncover the pressure points in Japan’s global storytelling as we begin the third decade of the 21st century. What is Japan’s story?

The Three G’s of Japan’s Story to the World

Shinzo Abe 2.0 returned triumphantly to the Prime Minister’s Office in December 2012, where he remains to this day—the longest-serving prime minister in Japanese history. Six months into Abe’s second term, I began my Abe Fellowship focusing on Japan’s global strategic communications after 3/11. I chose this as a starting point because it encompasses the nature/nurture combination of unavoidable *force majeure* disasters (earthquake and tsunami) with the avoidable human error (the Tokyo Electric Power Company’s mishandling

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³ Kolmaš, *National Identity and Japanese Revisionism*, p. 19.

of the Fukushima-Daiichi nuclear power plant meltdown). 3/11 also reignited domestic opposition to nuclear energy expansion and government-industry collusion. Once Abe secured the 2020 Summer Olympics for Tokyo in September 2013, Japan was globally relevant again. But becoming relevant in the eyes of the world cuts both ways. The media also turned a critical eye towards the Abe administration's public policies and 'Abenomics', and scrutinised embarrassing events the administration would rather have kept quiet. A quiver full of arrows was aimed at ministerial resignations, sales tax increases, low levels of consumer confidence, executive fiats, and state secrets. Most controversial has been the proposed revision of Article 9 of the constitution that would once again give Japan limited powers to fight in foreign wars, not strictly in defence of the nation as had been the rule ever since WWII. Global campaigns against Japan's whaling and dolphin hunting policies were soft power opportunities to align national policies with global standards. But that didn't happen. Japan took offence at being told what to do in relation to its fishing heritage.

Japan has persistent security challenges that I call the three Gs: gender, generation, and globalism. As with Japan's three Cs to avoid in the COVID-19 pandemic—closed spaces, crowded places, and close contact—there is no quick fix for these challenges. Each of the three Gs impacts military security readiness and national identity.

In April 2013, when Abe laid out the details of his Abenomics plan, he said that active participation by women would serve as the core of his growth strategy. The major goal was to have no less than 30 percent of leadership positions filled by women by 2020. The most recent World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report shows that Japan is ranked 121st of 153 countries, just before Kuwait and after the United Arab Emirates. This ranking is an all-time low for Japan, which also makes its gender parity ranking the lowest of any developed country. Among its G7 peers, Germany ranks highest for gender parity in 10th place followed by France (15th), Canada (19th), Britain (21st), United States (53rd), and Italy (76th). Japan fails to rank within the top 100.

Gender and Media Diplomacy Must Be National Priorities for Japan

'Womenomics' was the Abe administration's dream for diversity and inclusion. It was designed to increase the appointment of women to high-level public and private sector positions and to support the creation of economic opportunities for women. In the political empowerment category of the 2020 Global Gender

Gap report,⁴ gender parity in Japan lags far behind the global average, with women holding only 10% of parliamentary positions and 5.3% of ministerial positions. This is seven years after Abenomics was set in motion. Women's empowerment continues to decline, despite five high-profile ministerial-level World Assembly for Women (WAW!) gatherings in Tokyo since 2014 that included speeches by IMF president Christine Lagarde and her successor Kristalina Georgieva, along with Trump presidential adviser and first daughter, Ivanka Trump, who gave a keynote in 2017.⁵

With regard to demographics, Japan is an outlier among Asia Pacific nations. The generation gap in Japan is a common topic of concern with a high proportion of ageing Japanese. A 2004 report by the Pew Center's Global Attitudes Project, *A Global Generation Gap*, cited no major generation gaps in Asia, except in Japan, where 84% of older people thought that their culture was superior, compared with only 56% of those under the age of 30 who held the same view. The same report stated that there was 'widespread agreement' in Asia across all age groups regarding the importance of learning English, a sentiment held in common with other regions such as Latin America and Western Europe. (In the US and Britain there was widespread agreement across generations that learning a foreign language is important.) The lone exception was Japan, where 75% of those aged 65 and older 'completely agreed' that it was important for children to learn English, while only 45% of those aged 18–29 'completely agreed'.⁶ Although the study is dated, more recent studies by Rakuten and McKinsey & Co and my own interactions with hundreds of Japanese university students and elderly people, reinforce the idea that there is no reason to believe the generation gap is shrinking; attitudes diverge, not only with regard to learning English as the global *lingua franca*, but also with regard to politics and culture.

Japanese exceptionalism persists. What's more, the generation gap intersects with gender inequality: more often than not, young women in Japan express greater openness toward learning English and/or going abroad for travel or study. Japanese females make up between 60 and 70% of all study abroad participants, a phenomenon so noteworthy that it has spawned several new concepts in

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4 See [World Economic Forum 2020 Global Gender Gap Report](#).

5 The fifth [World Assembly for Women WAW!/W20](#), was held at the Hotel New Otani Tokyo on March 23–24, 2019, three months before the G20 in Osaka.

6 These findings are based on the Pew *Global Attitudes Project's* surveys conducted during 2002 and 2003 among more than 66,000 people in 49 nations plus the Palestinian Authority.

public diplomacy research—‘gender diplomats’ and ‘gender diplomacy’.⁷ The more globally-oriented mindset of women in Japan can be explained in part by the expectations traditionally placed on the stereotypical salaryman, or corporate (male) employee, to remain faithful to company and country for the chance of promotion, but there seems to be something else at stake here.

The more leaders such as Abe emphasise women’s empowerment in Japan, allowing for marriage/motherhood to be combined with work, the more Japanese women—and not men—awaken to their global potential. This new empowerment includes leaving Japan never to return. Nobuo Tanaka, chairman of the Sasakawa Peace Foundation in Tokyo, said that the brain drain phenomenon with regard to women in Japan is what led him to focus on women’s empowerment. When he worked abroad at the OECD and the IEA, he met many talented bilingual and trilingual female Japanese professionals who told him that they had no plans to return to Japan, and even if they did, they could not make use of their abilities there.⁸

Finally, globalisation/globalism, or the lack thereof, is an ongoing challenge for Japan. The country has had incredible success in creating a relatively safe and secure society, largely due to its traditional cultural values. The proportion of Japan’s population in jail is one-tenth that of the United States. Japan’s liberal democratic political structure, warts and all, is quite stable, though in need of greater ideological diversity and greater inclusiveness in ideology in political representation. Japan has much to be proud of—its prowess in science and innovation, rich culinary traditions, and family culture. On the minus side, individuals are discouraged from risk-taking and entrepreneurship—to be blunt, Japan is a red tape nightmare. It also lags behind its regional neighbours in understanding, explaining, and promoting its values and strengths to the international community. This is where third-party advisors in Japan, who have greater credibility than government spokespeople, can be of enormous value in helping the country to hone its communications to the outside world.

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7 See for example, Nancy Snow, ‘Japan must take lead in gender diplomacy’, *Japan Times*, 5 May 2017; Felicia Istad, ‘Gender in Public Diplomacy’, *USC Center for Public Diplomacy Blog*, 20 February 2020.

8 See ‘Women’s empowerment works in Japan’s interest: A call for male leaders to realize its value and promote it’, Sasakawa Peace Foundation. Interview by W20 Steering Committee member Renge Jibu with SPF Chairman Nobuo Tanaka, 15 May 2019.

Conclusion: Global Communications as If People Mattered

Unlike its immediate neighbours, South Korea and China, Japan has concentrated its institutions of higher education (like its hot spot tourist destinations) in only a few cities—Tokyo, Kyoto, and Sapporo. Japanese universities have no renowned international relations departments, and public relations as a discipline does not exist. Strategic communications, specifically public relations or public diplomacy, is largely a matter of on-the-job training. In contrast, China and the United States have well-developed infrastructures for the study of communications and international relations. At Schwarzman College in Tsinghua University, where I work, teaching public diplomacy falls to the School of Journalism and Communication and the Department of International Relations. As of yet, there is little foundation to support the development of professionalism and global sophistication that Japan needs to be able to communicate about its national interests and security in the global arena.

The bilateral security alliance has been hotly debated in Japanese domestic politics and among American elites. Issues that strain the longstanding relationship continually crop up; for instance, the rift between mainland Japan and Okinawa pertains to the vast US military presence in Japan's poorest prefecture and the seeming love/hate relationship native Okinawans have with local US military bases. On mainland Japan, US bases are discreetly tucked away: Yokosuka Naval Base is 61 kilometers from central Tokyo and Yokota Air Base is 54 kilometers distant. These military outposts go largely unnoticed by Japanese citizens going about their business. More concerning are external threats from a nuclear North Korea and an assertive China, particularly in the South China Sea, where rumblings of a new US-China cold war percolate despite the global public health crisis.

US-occupied post-war Japan had to 'embrace defeat'. In place of an imperial war system and a samurai past, Japan would be conditioned to embrace its newfound aversion to war as a tool for resolving conflicts. Article 9 of Japan's postwar constitution clearly states:

- (1) Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.

(2) In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognised.

The Japan-US Security Treaty of 1960 further cemented the marriage between the two countries. It was overseen by the unforgettable and formidable General Douglas MacArthur on the American side and Shinzo Abe's grandfather, Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi, on the Japanese side. In *Rearmed Japan*, Smith writes forebodingly that since Tokyo can no longer 'rely on Americans to defend Japan, Tokyo's political leaders are now confronting the possibility that they may need to prepare the nation's military for war'.

Under Abe, in 2015, the Japanese government gave \$5 million each to Columbia, Georgetown, and MIT to endow professorships in contemporary Japanese politics. Japan's political leaders may think it is gaining leverage in global capitals by funding endowed chairs, but elites talk to other elites and travel in the same small circles. The result has been a homogenizing reinforcement of the power dynamic. Japan follows orders while Cambridge, in Massachusetts or in the United Kingdom, gives them. Japan doesn't follow the habits of its Asian neighbours because its main economic competition is with the West. Japan's global communications needs an egalitarian overhaul. It does not need to grab headlines such as 'Japan sets aside \$22 million to buff government's global image amid pandemic struggles' published in April 2020 in *The Washington Post* about the money earmarked for the foreign ministry 'to dispel negative perceptions of Japan related to infectious diseases',⁹ and 'to strengthen communications about the situation in Japan—over the Internet and through its embassies'.¹⁰ In the age of a global pandemic, a country that can communicate naturally and seamlessly to both domestic and global publics is more likely to raise its global reputation.

In 2007, I published *The Arrogance of American Power*¹¹ in response to what I saw as an out of control executive branch engaging in a post-9/11 global war on terrorism with no end in sight. When crisis comes, as it has come to us now, we need all hands on deck, not just elected or self-elected leaders making unilateral

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⁹ Simon Denyer, 'Japan sets aside \$22 million to buff government's global image amid pandemic struggles', *The Washington Post*, 15 April 2020.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Snow, *The Arrogance of American Power: What U.S. Leaders are Doing Wrong and Why It's Our Duty to Dissent*, (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006).

decisions. The inspiration for my book came from *The Arrogance of Power* by J. William Fulbright, the namesake of the exchange programme that brought me to Germany as a student and to Japan as a professor. Fulbright wrote: 'We know so very much more about things than we do about people, so very much more about the workings of jet planes and nuclear missiles than about our own inner needs. We are exploring the mysteries of outer space while we remain puzzled and ignorant about the mysteries of our own minds. Far more than supersonic airplanes or rockets to the moon, we need objective perceptions of our own fears and hopes and a broader perspective about our own society, our relations with others and our place in the world.'¹² Fulbright could have easily been talking about Japan and its quest for an independent and critical voice on the global stage.

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¹² Fulbright, *The Arrogance of Power*, p. 173.

AI ETHICS: A STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS CHALLENGE

A Review Essay by Alex Lawrence-Archer

AI Narratives: A History of Imaginative Thinking about Intelligent Machines

Stephen Cave, Kanta Dihal, and Sarah Dillon (eds). Oxford University Press, 2020.

Rage Inside the Machine: The Prejudice of Algorithms, and How to Stop the Internet Making Bigots of Us All

Robert Elliot Smith. Bloomsbury Business, 2019.

Keywords—*strategic communication, strategic communications, AI, artificial intelligence, applied ethics, data science, machine learning*

About the Author

Alex Lawrence-Archer is Chief Operating Officer of the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation, an independent advisory body set up by the UK Government to advise on the ethics of data and artificial intelligence.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly seen as one of the defining technologies, if not *the* defining technology, of our era. In the last decade, it has been under an increasingly intense policy spotlight. Around the world, governments are engaged in a concerted effort to promote, develop, and encourage the use of AI.

No developed nation's industrial policy is complete without an AI strategy. The UK's AI Sector Deal aims to 'put the country at the forefront of the AI revolution'.¹ EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen made AI one of her top legislative priorities. China's *Next Generation for Artificial Intelligence Plan* aims for the country to become the 'primary' centre for AI innovation by 2030.² The OECD AI Policy Observatory lists no fewer than eleven documents within the category 'National Strategy' for the United States.³ These documents reveal not only a desire to promote the development of AI, but a drive to achieve 'leadership' in AI and to promote innovation 'at home'.

The increased focus on AI among governments has been matched in civil society, academia, and the media, with the establishment of new research institutes and policy programmes, rapid growth in AI course enrolment, and a slew of popular-science books on the topic.

Two recent books—*AI Narratives* edited by Stephen Cave, Kanta Dihal, and Sarah Dillon, and *Rage Inside the Machine* by Robert Elliot Smith—present two quite different conceptions of the term 'AI', and demonstrate that it is being used to cover an extraordinarily wide range of technologies and ideas. Taken together, *AI Narratives* and *Rage* illustrate both why communicating about AI is crucial to achieving strategic AI goals and why doing so is uniquely challenging.

Two letters, many meanings

AI is a term used relatively loosely in policymaking, in the media, and even in academia. It's a conveniently broad term that indicates the general space we are now working in, but its use can mask important nuances.

Historically, AI has often been thought of as the artificial replication of *human* intelligence, as machines capable of reasoning in the same way that we do. Machines, which—even if they are 'enslaved' in some way—are autonomous,

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¹ *AI Sector Deal*, UK Government, May 2019.

² *China Science and Technology Newsletter*, PR China Ministry of Science and Technology, September 2017

³ *Policy initiatives for United States, National strategies, agendas and plans*, OECD.AI, 2020.

with a will and mind of their own. Part I of *AI Narratives* details the pre-20th century history of thought about this type of AI, from handmaids made of gold appearing in Homer's *Iliad*, to a metal statue capable of reason designed (legend has it) by medieval philosopher Albertus Magnus, and fraudulent speaking dolls that toured 18th century Britain.

AI Narratives has a strong bent towards AI that replicates human-like reasoning and independent will. Part II explores modern AI narratives through several different lenses, including the enslavement of artificial will [Chapter 8], the mindedness of AI [Chapter 10], AI as the 'child' of humanity [Chapter 11], and the possibility of uploading a human mind into a machine [Chapter 13].

AI Narratives therefore focuses on questions and controversies directly related to the idea of human-like AI. These are questions and ideas familiar to us from popular culture—testament to the traditional dominance of human-like AI in our shared imagination: *Is it conscious? Should it have human rights? Will it stop obeying us, outmatch our capabilities, and take over?* Fascinating though these questions are, they have little relevance to the type of AI that has been the focus of advances in capability, deployment, and social change over the past decade.

As forms of AI have moved—through advances in computing—from the realm of fantasy into our everyday reality, so AI as a term has expanded into more of an umbrella term. It encompasses both 'broad AI'—the capacity to understand or learn any intellectual task that a human being can, and 'narrow AI'—non-autonomous AI capable of performing limited, specific tasks very well.

Rage provides a useful counterpoint to *AI Narratives* in that it focuses heavily on narrow AI—the type of AI in use throughout our economy and society today. Specifically, *Rage* charts AI advances that have been made possible by the increasing sophistication and deployment of data science (the extraction of knowledge and insights from structured and unstructured data) and machine learning (a branch of data science in which computer programmes are trained to optimise for a given variable—for example the number of web users clicking on a link in an advert—and make predictions based on large amounts of past data).

That it is a subset of AI and is not meaningfully autonomous does not make narrow AI insignificant. While it is true that we have long used algorithms and data to aid decision-making, recent years have seen a step-change in the amount of data available, the ease (and cheapness) with which it can be collected, stored,

and processed, and the complexity—and sometimes opacity—of the algorithms developed in the process.

As *Rage* outlines, machine learning algorithms and their predictions, recommendations, and decisions have come to be integral to everything from searching the internet to making decisions on paroling prisoners. The same fundamental technological principles underpin image recognition, which will be integral to autonomous vehicles, and natural language processing and voice recognition, which are needed to run the personal assistants on our phones.

Policy initiatives, national strategies, and research and start-up ecosystems, not to mention commercial applications that have taken on strategic significance for developed nations over the past decade, are overwhelmingly concerned with narrow AI. However, this bears little resemblance to the images that historically have dominated the popular imagination—the ideas explored in *AI Narratives*.

This essay goes on to outline why the growing use of narrow AI has come to be seen as an ethical issue, and how this makes strategic communications an important tool in the implementation of national AI strategies.

What do we mean by ‘ethics’?

Ethics is a branch of philosophy that deals with questions of right and wrong, of what is morally good or desirable for individuals and society. Ethical principles can tend towards the abstract: accountability, fairness, economic welfare, and human flourishing, for example. Such principles are inherently contestable; the ‘right’ amount of transparency in a given situation is not an objective matter. And they are often in tension with each other; a solution that uses public money most efficiently may not be the most equitable or transparent.

New technologies—especially those that have a significant impact on society—often raise ethical questions. They change how our world is structured; they create winners and losers. Ethics do not provide an easy formula for answering the questions raised. But because they go to the heart of how society ‘should’ work, ethics are at the centre of debates about how society responds to major technological shifts.

Why is AI an ethical issue?

Where there are AI strategies, there is AI ethics. The UK's AI Sector Deal refers to the creation of the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation, established to help ensure safe and ethical innovation in data-driven technology. As part of its AI strategy development, the European Commission has promulgated Ethics Guidelines for 'Trustworthy AI'.⁴ Even the US Department of Defence has adopted AI ethics principles.⁵

Ethics are central to national efforts to promote AI for three principal reasons:

1. There is an ethical imperative to seize—and to equitably distribute—the significant benefits that AI technology offers. Recent years have seen major advances in the use of AI to diagnose certain conditions—especially those relying on the analysis of medical scans—opportunities that are vital to seize. Huge economic gains have been made using AI to better match consumer demand with supply through online shopping platforms, but questions about the distributional impact of this change abound.
2. The growing use of AI creates diverse ethical dilemmas in relation to privacy, corporate and state power, transparency, bias, and autonomy to name a few. Online platforms are incentivised to hoover up increasing amounts of our data, often in ways that are not particularly transparent. Algorithms used in financial services and recruitment have been shown to be consistently biased against women due to their reliance on historical data.
3. The growing use of AI is likely to have impacts on democracy and sovereignty. AI systems now mediate the flow of the information that makes up our public discourse, potentially impacting the outcome of elections. And AI promises (or threatens) to open up new technological avenues in warfare and security.

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⁴ *Ethics Guidelines for Trustworthy AI*, Independent High-Level Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence/European Commission, April 2019.

⁵ C. Todd Lopez, 'DOD Adopts 5 Principles of Artificial Intelligence Ethics', US Department of Defense Blog, February 2020.

Opportunities

It is relatively uncontroversial to argue that the widespread adoption and implementation of AI technology that already exists promises significant benefits. One recent estimate puts the incremental contribution AI could make to the global economy by 2030 at 16%, or \$13 trillion through new products and services, productivity gains, and more efficient matching of supply and demand.⁶

AI also promises to help improve public administration, enabling the state to deliver more and better services more cheaply through improved anomaly detection, demand prediction, and tailoring of services, and more consistent and scalable decision-making in general. Building on behavioural insights and commercial targeting techniques, AI can even be used to influence citizens' behaviour in ways that promote social objectives.⁷ Cases exist in almost every sector, from health diagnosis and revenue collection to defence and security.⁸

Perhaps most promising of all, AI has the potential to help us solve some of society's most intractable problems. At the time of writing, AI is being used to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic through drug discovery, outbreak detection, diagnosis, and demand prediction within the health sector.⁹ Most controversially, contact tracing via relatively simple AI combined with high rates of smartphone penetration may form part of the approach to scaling back strict social distancing measures in many countries.¹⁰ In the longer term, AI may play a key role in helping us reduce climate change through better climate modelling and optimising energy efficiency at scale.

Ethical dilemmas

Machine-learning-based AI that promises these benefits is reliant on large amounts of data, often opaque, and weighted towards optimising based on past outcomes. These features, among others, have meant its implementation at scale and in increasingly sensitive contexts, which has thrown up significant ethical dilemmas.

6 'Notes from the AI Frontier: Modelling the Impact of AI on the World Economy', McKinsey Global Institute, 4 September 2018.

7 Sofia Ranchordás, 'Nudging Citizens Through Technology in Smart Cities', *International Review of Law, Computers & Technology*, Volume 33 (2019).

8 Alexander Babuta, 'Artificial Intelligence and the Integrated Review: The Need for Strategic Prioritisation', Royal United Services Institute, April 2020.

9 Bernard Marr, 'Coronavirus: How Artificial Intelligence, Data Science And Technology Is Used To Fight The Pandemic', *Forbes*, 13 March 2020.

10 Leo Kelion, 'Coronavirus: NHS Contact Tracing App to Target 80% of Smartphone Users', *BBC News*, 16 April 2020.

These are not the ethical dilemmas of consciousness, independence, and agency that are the main focus of *AINarratives*. For ethical challenges created by machine learning, *Rage* is a more reliable guide, detailing variously dehumanisation of workers [Chapter 6], bias against marginalised groups [Chapter 7], and increased polarisation in online discourse [Chapter 10].

Rage is just one of a slew of recent books to have explored these and other issues. There is a growing awareness of the characteristics of this technology that seriously threaten to turn people against it, if it is not well-managed:

- The reliance of AI on data and the increasing ease with which it can be collected and processed, creates strong incentives for organisations to gather data on individuals, which creates risks to individual and collective privacy. This dynamic was particularly evident in the recent *Cambridge Analytica* scandal.
- AI is significantly shifting the balance of power between individuals on the one hand, and institutions on the other. From optimising online experiences for the consumer to maximise sales, to subjecting workers to algorithmic management, to tracking citizens using facial recognition technology, companies and states are increasingly able to predict and influence our behaviour in significant ways.
- The fact that machine-learning-derived algorithms are often opaque in their operation—sometimes referred to as ‘black boxes’—creates problems in contexts where understanding why a decision has been made is vital for procedural fairness, such as in criminal justice and welfare systems.
- Reliance on data about past decisions and circumstances makes AI prone to replicating the historical biases of human decision-makers. In recruitment, for example, algorithms have been shown to exhibit bias against female candidates, reflecting historical patterns of human hiring managers’ decisions. In criminal justice, AI systems have been shown consistently and unfairly to rate black defendants at greater risk of recidivism than their white counterparts in the US.

Sovereignty

States face an imperative not only to seize the opportunities that AI represents and manage risks to their citizens, but to develop a domestic ability to understand, regulate, and control the technology. Failure to do so means states risk being unable to meaningfully influence technology that increasingly mediates everything, including communications, finance, industrial processes, and warfare. The influence of social media algorithms on how information circulates during election periods is a case in point.

AI ethics initiatives—inside and outside government—have proliferated globally in an attempt to grapple with these issues. It is a broad and rapidly developing area of policy characterised by a sense of urgency as each state races to define its own distinctive approach to the technology, hoping to avoid becoming an AI ‘rule- and standards-taker’. In the UK and EU in particular, trust in AI has become one of the core components of that approach.

‘Trust’ in AI?

The EU White Paper on AI is subtitled ‘A European Approach to Excellence and Trust’. The Hall and Pesenti Review, which underpins the UK Government’s current AI strategy, cautions that ‘building public confidence and trust will be vital to successful development of UK AI’.¹¹

Trust in AI’s development and use is both an indicator that the ethical challenges of the technology are being well managed, and a key to achieving the scale of adoption necessary to realise its benefits and share them equitably. If using AI fails to win and maintain public trust, we risk a reluctance to adopt the technology, and to use and share data with AI-powered services. That will lead to lower levels of training, and to major challenges in realising benefits in the public sector. There scrutiny is high, officials are risk-averse, and broad social licence to innovate is needed. In the medium-term, low levels of trust incline to a build-up of public pressure, which could result in poorly thought-through regulation.

Creating an environment in which AI is both trustworthy and trusted by the public is vital to AI strategies in the UK, the EU, and further afield. The data-

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¹¹ Wendy Hall and Jérôme Pesenti, *Growing the Artificial Intelligence Industry in the UK*, October 2017.

driven Covid-19 contact tracing apps that look set to form part of a number of governments' lockdown exit strategies are thought to need between 60 and 80% penetration among the population to be effective.¹² Short of compulsion, public trust in this technology will be non-negotiable if such levels are to be achieved. Trust in AI is a strategic issue.

Information on the extent to which AI is trusted as a technology is patchy. ODI/YouGov polling in 2019 showed that only 5% in the UK trust social media companies to use their data ethically, rising to only 30% for central government.¹³ IPSOS global polling in 2019 found that twice as many people felt that both government and business use of AI should be more tightly controlled, and that 41% of people are generally uneasy about AI.¹⁴

Even if long-term and consistent measurement of trust in AI and how it is governed is limited, there is good reason to believe that it is not trending in the direction necessary for the long-term success of national AI strategies.

Government action to guide the development and use of AI with a view to making it more *trustworthy* has significantly increased in recent years. The establishment of the UK Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation and the EU Guidelines for Trustworthy AI are just two examples. Similar initiatives have been set up in Singapore,¹⁵ Germany,¹⁶ and Canada,¹⁷ to name a few. For now, this work is relatively behind-the-scenes. Public narratives about AI and how they change in response to initiatives like these will determine whether AI becomes not only more trustworthy, but more *trusted* by the public.

Narratives, trust, and public concerns

A number of historically controversial technologies are useful in demonstrating the role that narratives play in determining levels of trust, adoption, and development.

The UK and EU experience of genetically modified (GM) food technology is frequently cited as a salutary lesson for those seeking to promote the adoption of

12 Chris Stokel-Walker, 'Can Mobile Contact-tracing Apps Help Lift Lockdown?', *BBC News*, 16 April 2020.

13 'Nearly 9 in 10 People Think it's Important that Organisations Use Personal Data Ethically', *The Open Data Institute*, 12 November 2019.

14 'New Global Poll: Widespread Concern about Artificial Intelligence', IPSOS MORI, 1 July 2019.

15 'Artificial Intelligence', Singapore Media Development Authority, 2019.

16 *Report of the German Data Ethics Commission*, Bundesministerium der Justiz und für Verbraucherschutz, 2019.

17 *Responsible Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)*, Government of Canada, 2019.

AI in the UK. This new technology promised enormous potential productivity gains, particularly in developing countries. In 2004, Burke detailed how it came to be deeply mistrusted in the UK and the EU, with public narratives focusing on the risks it represented, on potential runaway impacts, and on the lack of consensus among scientists about the technology.¹⁸

In their earlier work, *Portrayals and Perceptions of AI and Why They Matter*, the editors of *AI Narratives* explain how GM food...

...became a lightning rod for these broader societal concerns. In such narratives, multinational corporations played a key role, often contributing to scepticism about who would benefit from the widespread adoption of GM.¹⁹

Despite the weight of evidence showing that the technology is safe, by 2014 YouGov polling showed twice as many (40% to 22%) in the UK felt the government should not promote the technology. Although far from universally popular, GM technologies enjoy a greater level of trust in the US. Pew Research in 2016 showed 61% of US adults feel GM food is either better, or no better or worse, than non-GM for one's health. Doubtless, factors other than narratives and trust have had an impact, but since the 1990s both the US and the EU have taken starkly different courses. The US is a world leader in GM crop cultivation; almost no GM crops are commercially grown in the EU.

Advances in human fertilisation and embryology technology provide a complementary example. This ethically controversial and emotive technology promised enormous benefits to individual families and to the understanding and treating of diseases. The mid-1980s saw a concerted, government-led initiative to debate the ethical issues of the technology,²⁰ culminating in the Warnock Report of 1984, which underpinned the development of a robust regulatory system for the technology in the UK.²¹ Public opinion of embryonic stem-cell research, an especially controversial branch of this technology, has been net-positive and steadily increasing since 2003 in the UK.²²

18 Derek Burke, 'GM food and crops: what went wrong in the UK?', *European Molecular Biology Organization*, EMBO Rep. 2004 May; 5(5): 432–36.

19 *Portrayals and Perceptions of AI and Why They Matter*, The Royal Society, November 2019.

20 Jo Thomas, 'British Debate Embryo Research', *The New York Times*, 16 October 1984.

21 'The Warnock Report on Human Fertilization and Embryology', *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, Issue 10, July 1985.

22 'Stem Cell Research', Gallup, 2019.

These analogies are limited. The technologies concerned are very different. AI is a general purpose technology that anyone can make use of without a lab or (for now) a licence. It is a technology that is already in widespread use; meaning, we face the challenge of ‘catching up’ to existing narratives. But these examples do, I argue, indicate the impact that popular understanding about a technology’s trustworthiness can—over time—have on the extent to which it is developed and adopted.

AI narratives

There is limited documentation of the public debate on and narratives about AI and how it is governed. *AI Narratives* shows how the most dominant narratives in academic and policy literature and in general fiction are those concerned with human-replicating AI rather than with machine learning as we see it today (the *Black Mirror* TV series is a notable exception). In the press, discussions of the potential for automation to lead to large-scale unemployment appears to have achieved significant cut-through.²³

Rage is part of a trend in popular science reporting of growing coverage of genuine ethical concerns with machine-learning-driven AI. In the book, Smith posits narrative links between the technology and eugenics, slavery, and denial of women’s suffrage. Most recently, coverage of the technology underpinning mobile-app-based Covid-19 contact tracing has strongly focused on themes of surveillance, authoritarianism, and social control. These are narratives that have become recurring themes in the discussions surrounding AI.

The growing work undertaken to make AI a more *trustworthy* technology is taking place in a challenging narrative context. Translating that work into a dividend of greater *trust* in the technology, given the narratives already at play, will take a concerted and skillful strategic communications effort.

The role of strategic communications

To achieve the wider AI objectives of innovation, widespread adoption, and standard-setting, states will have to develop strategies to speak to the public

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²³ See for example: ‘UK Workers Who Lose Jobs to AI Will Be Retrained’, BBC, 18 July 2019; Jonathan Vanian, ‘Artificial Intelligence Will Obliterate These Jobs by 2030’, *Fortune*, 19 November 2019; ‘Workplace Automation, How AI Is Coming For Your Job’, FT, September 2019.

about AI and data-driven technology, and about the work already being done to make these technologies worthy of public trust.

Strategic communications will need to address how we move away from a situation characterised by low levels of understanding of real AI, low levels of transparency about where and how it is being deployed, and general unease fuelled by a sense that society is not sufficiently in control of the technology.

Strategic communications encouraging greater trust in AI might seek to persuade the public to *think* that government is taking action to govern the technology, to *feel* that society is in the driving seat of how it develops, and to *share* data, so that the public will make use of AI services and support public sector innovation. To achieve these objectives, we will naturally need to communicate how the relevant technologies are being used and governed. We'll also need to demonstrate how government and civil society are working to make improvements to that governance. And we'll likely need to go even further, directly involving the public in the key debates about what needs to change.

Strategic communications seeking to build trust in AI is in its infancy. As it develops, a range of challenges will need to be overcome.

The historical background and sensational nature of the most common narratives about AI—killer robots, AI slave uprisings, mass unemployment—makes them dominant and difficult to shift. Especially when the conversations that we actually need to have with the public are about the more technical, difficult-to-grasp issues catalogued in *Rage*. In their earlier work, the editors of *AI Narratives* identified this problem.²⁴

Those state actors most motivated to build trust in AI are likely to be at a credibility disadvantage with the very audiences they seek to influence. The polling referred to above showed that just 30% in the UK trust the government to use their data ethically; and when some of the most important ethical issues relate to increasing state power, skepticism about government intentions is natural. For similar reasons, the relationship between governments on the one hand, and the campaign groups and civil society organisations that drive much of the public conversation on the other, is a complicated one.

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²⁴ '[A]n over-emphasis on implausible AI and humanoid robotics could overshadow issues that are already creating challenges today. These issues are often harder to describe through compelling narratives.' *Portrayals and Perceptions of AI and Why They Matter*, The Royal Society, November 2019.

A long-term approach will need to generate a consistent positive trend in understanding and supporting the use of AI in the face of the inevitable scandals and setbacks to come. Given that public understanding of the technology and the ethical challenges it brings is low, greater regulatory enforcement and public debate may cause trust in AI to *fall* in the short-term.

Public participation in the complex ethical discussions that AI has generated is seen as an important component of increasing trust. In the UK, the Data Protection Regulator²⁵ and the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation²⁶ have both carried out public engagement work on AI ethics issues, mirrored by a wide range of similar activity in civil society.²⁷

Bringing together representative members of the public to meet in person, using expert witnesses to help them understand how AI works, and facilitating discussions on the ethical implications, is expensive. A relatively focused series of dialogue sessions with 100 members of the public is likely to cost upwards of £100,000. This expense means that statistically significant numbers of the general public cannot be directly involved in public dialogue activities. Creative approaches will be needed to leverage smaller projects that create a *sense* of widespread, even national, participation in the debate.

Perhaps most importantly, we lack comprehensive evidence on the current state of the AI communications space. Well-designed strategic communications require a solid evidence base about audiences, narratives and influencers. Communications aimed at promoting trust in AI will, therefore, necessitate a good understanding of narratives audience segments, and influencers in that specific space. Understanding the communications space is the most urgent next step for governments and civil society because action must be taken—but how communications will land is hard to judge, and the costs of getting it wrong are high.

AI Narratives is an excellent starting point for the most influential historical and literary narratives on AI. But we need to understand how these are actually playing out among the public and, especially, how they are interacting with our growing understanding of what machine-learning-based AI can actually do.

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²⁵ 'Artificial Intelligence Citizens' Juries', UK Information Commissioner's Office, 18 February 2019.

²⁶ 'CDEI Concludes a Programme of Public Engagement Workshops on the Ethics of Online Targeting', UK Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation, 31 July 2019.

²⁷ *How To Stimulate Effective Public Debate on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence*, Involve, 2019.

The final chapter of *AI Narratives* details what can be done with AI itself to gather information on how AI is being discussed online. However, work like this will need to be complemented by traditional quantitative and qualitative audience and media research, including long-term consistent measurement of understanding of and trust in AI.

Conclusion

We must remain open-minded about where that research leads us. The dominant historical themes explored by *AI Narratives* might be easy to plug into, given the space they already occupy in the public imagination. Equally, they might be so far removed from the technology as it really is that they prove a distraction. Only innovative qualitative research, experimentation, and iteration can help us feel our way towards a resolution of this dilemma. That process may demonstrate that existing narratives can be repurposed in some way; it may prove that we are better off talking about very specific types and implementations of data-driven technology.

The term ‘AI’ itself, with its many meanings, might be an unhelpful one, too weighed down with historical baggage to be useful moving forward. *AI Narratives* is a useful exposition of the sheer weight of that baggage, which has so little to do with the technology that governments want to promote. ‘Data-driven technology’, ‘algorithmic decision-making’, and ‘machine learning’ are just some of the alternative terms in circulation, but entirely new ones may be needed. We will need to be flexible about how best to talk about these technologies—and our work to govern them—in a way that connects with the people whose trust we seek.

The Covid-19 pandemic has thrown into sharp relief (i) the important benefits AI can offer, (ii) why trust is crucial to realising those benefits, and (iii) the role that narratives—especially those around major events—play in determining levels of trust. Put simply, it has never been more important for governments to build and maintain the trust of their citizens in data-driven technology. Strategic communications will be a vital tool in this, but there are significant pitfalls that must be avoided. Solid research is needed to help us tell new stories about a surprisingly old idea in ways that serve our AI present and future.

COMMUNICATING THREAT IN AN ERA OF SPEED AND FETISHISED TECHNOLOGY

A Review Essay by Karen Allen

Army of None: Autonomous Weapons and the Future of War

Paul Scharre. WW Norton & Company, 2019.

Future War—Preparing for the New Global Battlefield

Robert Latiff. Alfred A. Knopf, 2017.

Keywords—*strategic communications, strategic communication, technology, big data, cyberspace, international relations, future warfare*

About the Author

Karen Allen is a Senior Research Advisor for Emerging Threats in Africa at the Institute for Security Studies and a Visiting Fellow at King's College London. Her article 'How the Global War on Terror Killed the Prospects for Justice for Kenyan Victims of Violence' was published in Volume 6 (Spring 2019) of this journal.

In 2003, in the early stages of Operation Telic (the British equivalent to the US Operation Iraqi Freedom), a US Patriot Missile downed a British Royal Air Force Tornado not far from the Kuwaiti airbase at Ali Al Saleem. The pilot and navigator, both men in their mid 30s, with whom I, as an embedded journalist, had shared breakfast on the base earlier that day, were killed instantly. It was a tragic mistake and a sobering reminder of the perils of friendly fire, from what back then was a state-of-the-art piece of technology and a crucial component of the coalition's air defence capability. The Patriot Missile's powerful radar had the ability to react at speed to incoming ballistic missiles, which doubtless saved many thousands of lives during the conflict. Yet when it mistook an allied fighter jet for an enemy anti-radiation missile there was simply no time for humans to intervene.

Moreover, the swift communication of the incident was delayed for the sake of 'force protection' and presumably an awareness among military and government communicators of the strategic value news of this tragic incident would have for Saddam Hussein's forces. This news containment strategy was possible given the terms of agreement between the military and broadcasters to embed their journalists during the early stages of the conflict—a trade-off between security and access on the one hand and reporting restrictions on the other. Yet in the weeks that followed, as coalition forces headed closer to Baghdad, that control mechanism was relaxed. 24/7 news and the speed of imagery enabled TV journalists to broadcast, in real time, Tornado jets armed with 'precision guide' weapons departing from their base in the Kuwaiti desert, and then, shortly after, to relay live the impact of those weapons on the ground (not always hitting their intended targets). This marked a milestone in strategic communications during conflict. 'Precision' was a key term in the lexicon of government communicators; it was used to convey the idea that conflicts would be resolved with minimal 'collateral damage'. To policymakers, the second Iraq war in 2003 revealed the promise and perils of real time news, as mobile satellite technology became ubiquitous in conflict reporting.

Nearly two decades later, speed has become further entrenched as the currency of war. It has been amplified with the dawn of new autonomous technologies able to react at hypersonic speeds. Speed, combined with the fetishisation of tech, both in the civilian and military spheres, along with social media platforms enhanced by artificial intelligence (from which both state and threat actors can livestream their '*propaganda of the deed*' messaging and engagements) presents a stark vision of a future battlefield, which both Robert Latiff in *Future War*—

Preparing for the New Global Battlefield and Paul Scharre's *Army of None* set out in steely detail. Scharre describes how an 'arms race in speed' has already begun, drawing parallels with the accelerated pace of trading on the financial stock markets. His interviews with David Brumley, a celebrated computer scientist and winner of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) Grand Cyber Challenge, reveal the dash to dominate. The interviews capture the competitive cycle between adversaries, and how cyber threats 'co-evolve as the other deploys new systems and measures' pushing players to 'react and evolve faster than [their] adversaries'.¹

What this review essay seeks to highlight is that speed and the fetishisation of tech are mutually reinforcing qualities, both in conflict settings and in strategic communications, continuously escalating the speed of delivery. This can be a force for good or for ill. Accelerated speeds and coveted cutting-edge technologies mean that threats can now be detected faster than the human brain can comprehend, but this also further dehumanises warfare by potentially threatening human autonomy and relegating individuals to the role of bystander or commentator. In the field of strategic communications, the ubiquitous use of newer, faster, and more aesthetically pleasing smart phones (the industry estimates there are at least three billion smartphones in circulation worldwide)² has wrested away from governments the monopoly of 'one-way traffic of information',³ thus democratising messaging. Global politics are now shaped in part by the voices of individuals and other non-state actors on the basis of 'likes' swiftly amplified through social media. This process in turn creates a self-perpetuating dynamic and arguably forces a race for technological advantage in both warfare and communications. Speed is privileged over time-consuming reflection and deliberation about how to communicate nuances.

Cultural scientist Paul Virilio studies the impact of speed and technology on society and politics. He characterises speed as: 'nothing other than [the] unleashing of violence'.⁴ There is a calamitous inevitability in his vision. Virilio focuses on what he terms 'dromology'—the logic of speed—in his seminal work *Speed and Politics*. He concludes that speed will be the trigger for new wars due to unintended consequences resulting from technological advances. His analysis is at odds with the Clausewitzian aphorism that 'war is a continuation of

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1 Paul Scharre, *Army of None: Autonomous Weapons and the Future of War* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2019), p. 203.

2 'Number of Smartphone Users Worldwide from 2016 to 2021', *Statista*, 28 February 2020.

3 Neville Bolt, 'Strategic Communications in Crisis', *RUSI Journal*, Vol. 156, N° 4, 1 August 2011.

4 J. Armitage, *Virilio Now: Current Perspectives in Virilio Studies* (Polity Press, 2011), p. 62.

politics by other means’.⁵ In Virilio’s world view, technology, not power politics, drives conflict; it is speed that has agency, not the individuals who seek to tame or usurp it.

This essay argues that maintaining human agency in deploying speed through emerging technologies is critical, as we enter what has been described by Klaus Schwab of the World Economic Forum as the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Although this essay will not dwell on the philosophical basis of speed and conflict, Virilio’s sense of a breathless (and reckless) technological dash to acquire ever faster technologies conjures up the potent image of a runaway vehicle whose brakes have failed and is hurtling out of control. It is that loss of control, or rather of *human* control, that will be our focus. Indeed, in *Future War* Latiff predicts that ‘the sheer speed of battle will stress decision making’⁶ moving forward. By extension, that same stress, underpinned by speed, will also be felt in any policy communications associated with conflict. Does this mean that we will be making poor decisions and transmitting mixed messages? Or does it suggest that decision-making will be surrendered to machines capable of faster speeds than the human brain? The answer may be all of the above.

How is warfighting manifested and communicated in the age of speed?

The new global battlefield is characterised by dual-use technologies—those that have both civilian and military applications. Furthermore, this new terrain is defined by the democratisation of technology; innovations in applied science that were once reserved for the military are now widely available and affordable. GPS and geolocation technologies are clear examples of this. Manuals and information exchange about some of today’s most powerful weapons are now freely available on the internet. Drone technology is a powerful example of the democratisation of tech. Feted for their transformative role in delivering blood samples and lifesaving medicines in developing countries, and for facilitating public messaging over wide geographical areas in emergencies such as the global COVID-19 pandemic, drones can also be deployed by threat actors to deadly effect. In 2016 I personally witnessed in the field how shop-bought drones, or Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), were being weaponised in Iraq. Carrying a payload of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), drones became ISIS’s favoured weapon in the battle for Mosul. As a journalist and embedded observer,

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⁵ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 87.

⁶ Robert Latiff, *Future War—Preparing for the New Global Battlefield* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2017), p. 24.

I felt that a new milestone in warfighting had been reached—a paradigm shift in how the state’s previous monopoly on emerging tech was being smashed and hijacked. Anecdotal reports have since emerged of non-state actors using armed UAVs in their piracy operations off the coast of Africa. Power is shifting from states to private entities and individuals in borderless battlefields. At times it surely feels like states are playing catch up.

The same shift is being observed in how conflicts are represented. As Bolt writes, ‘state communicators are being outmanoeuvred by insurgent strategists’⁷ as access to aggregated data and speedier transmission mechanisms becomes more affordable and readily available. Whilst the traditional top-down bureaucratic channels of state communications are slow moving, the networked character of insurgent groups such as ISIS affords threat actors greater agility in conveying their messages. For example, video imagery of the Christchurch mosque attack in 2019 was streamed in real-time by right-wing extremists as events unfolded. Law enforcement was caught on the back foot. The incident prompted the tech industry to tighten controls for livestreaming and otherwise sharing news of shocking events, which challenged their claim of neutrality.⁸ It was also a salutary reminder for strategic communicators of their own vulnerabilities. Given the ubiquitous nature of social media platforms, states and their media mouthpieces are no longer the gatekeepers of messages broadcast to the public, which increasingly forces them into defensive communications positions. The distance between actor and audience has shrunk whilst the ability to convey information (or disinformation) at speed and on a large scale has increased, providing nearly any ‘influencer’ with a bully pulpit. The potential of new technology is as apparent to commercial marketeers who pay data analysts considerable sums for identifying advantageous influencer networks as it is to governments and threat actors seeking superiority in contested spaces.

The new terrain in cyberspace has forced us to redefine the battlefield, the nature of threat, and the possibilities for strategic response. The lines have become blurred. Whilst legitimate state communicators must be aware of how different audiences perceive the nuances of strategic messaging, threat actors are under no such constraints. Unencumbered by qualms over collateral damage, fear-inducing *propaganda of the deed* can be widely disseminated. For communications professionals it is an asymmetric domain.

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⁷ Bolt, ‘Strategic Communications in Crisis’.

⁸ ‘Christchurch Attacks: Facebook Curbs Live Feature’, *BBC News*, 15 May 2019.

The internet has enabled malevolent actors to attack at scale. Think of the high-profile distributed denial of service (DDoS) attack against Estonia in 2007⁹ or the attack by a lone hacker against Google and Skype in 2018.¹⁰ Threats are no longer emanating from competing militaries and state actors but from armed insurgents, predatory commercial entities, ‘hacktivists’ articulating protest, and individuals acting for personal gain. In a world of hybrid threats, soldiers of the future—likely including drug smugglers, computer hackers, and financiers—will be able to combine cyberattacks with conventional warfare to achieve their ends.

Urgent high-level discussions are taking place in the UN to define what constitutes a threat in cyberspace and to determine whether the existing laws governing armed conflict are sufficient to grapple with this new paradigm shift. There is a breathlessness about the efforts of the UN’s First Committee in establishing a Group of Government Experts and an Open-Ended Working Group to discuss responsible state behaviour in cyberspace. Yet no definition of cyberwar has been agreed upon to date. This is contentious terrain that touches upon issues of freedom of speech, state surveillance, and sovereignty. Furthermore, as the boundaries between virtual threats and their real-world consequences are increasingly blurred, pressure to react rapidly and competently is mounting. But speed does not guarantee good decisions. As Latiff observes: ‘traditional deliberations and decision making are being lost’. Time, it would seem, is an important condition for achieving peace, although the growing culture of ‘Twitter Diplomacy’ suggests that some global leaders hold an alternative view.¹¹

The boundary between the real and the virtual is also being obscured by wearable technologies that enhance a soldier’s fighting capabilities on the ground (this will be touched upon later). Such technologies enable combatants to receive vast amounts of data about their targets, which is justified by the greater precision and efficiency that can be achieved. The growing interconnectedness among objects (the Internet of Things) that can be transformed into tech-enabled weaponry is facilitating the emergence of ‘networked war’. Networked war has ushered in new modes of operation that increasingly involve humans working alongside robots. As the speed and functionality of new tech increases it may not be clear who is actually in charge. As we shall see later, this shift in humans

9 ‘Russia Accused of Unleashing Cyberwar to Disable Estonia’, *The Guardian*, 16 May 2007.

10 Charlie Osborne, ‘Hacker Jailed for DDoS Attacks against Skype and Google’, *ZDNet*, 22 January 2018.

11 Chu Wang, ‘Twitter Diplomacy: Preventing Twitter Wars From Escalating Into Real Wars’, Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Centre for Science and International Affairs, 20 May 2019.

ceding responsibility to robots has implications for the foundational principles of the laws of war—necessity, distinction, and proportionality. It also muddies the waters with respect to accountability, which influences the strategic narratives governments use to motivate the decision to go to war.

Speed in conflict is also enabled by vast amounts of data and data processing capacity assisted by artificial intelligence. Whilst such developments provide more accurate information and actionable evidence, they similarly enable networking, virtual recruitment, and disinformation campaigns undertaken by non-state actors as part of their information war strategy. The acquisition of speed by threat actors forces governments to rebut and retaliate with equal velocity, feeding the idea of an ‘arms race’ in speed that subordinates long-game strategic communications to tactical and reactive messaging. This comes with the risk of inconsistent and even contradictory communications, which ultimately serves to undermine credibility. The confused narratives surrounding the US bombing of a hospital run by the charity Médecins Sans Frontières in Northern Afghanistan in 2015 provide a potent example of this.¹²

Speed also challenges attempts to secure peace and potentially compromises states’ ability to de-escalate conflict through early, non-kinetic interventions, such as throwing a ‘kill switch’ or introducing a ‘pause’ to enable politics to resist the slide into war. Widely-reported drone incursions in the East China Sea, referenced by Latiff, are perhaps a good example of how technological advances can, accidentally, edge us closer to war. Efforts to quickly de-escalate tensions when UAVs are captured or lost over contested territories may have worked in the past, but they are not guaranteed.

The fetishisation of technology

As speed marches ever forward, the fetishisation of tech becomes increasingly seductive.¹³ The desire to go faster and farther, more efficiently and at a lower cost, forms part of the allure of the new. This is true in civilian life as well; in 2016, carefully crafted marketing campaigns ensured that shop-bought drones would be among the most coveted Christmas gifts that year.¹⁴ Unlike plodding evolution in human knowledge and understanding, or time-consuming compromises

12 ‘Pentagon Details Chain of Errors in Strike on Afghan Hospital’ New York Times 30/04/2016.

13 Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (Vintage, 1993).

14 Ashley Halsey III, ‘Drone Sales Soaring this Christmas, Capping a Record Year for the Industry’, *The Washington Post*, 23 December 2016.

and negotiated deals, speedier tech promises immediate impact. Furthermore, tech seduces users with what Latiff calls the illusion of security.¹⁵ Back in the civilian world, the recent hacking or ‘surfing attacks’ on voice assistants such as Google Assistant and Siri, challenge this illusion.¹⁶ And yet, these products continue to sell well. The instant gratification of spending rather than saving, is perhaps another useful analogy through which to view the fetishisation of speed. This is not to undermine the clear benefits of emerging technologies in conflict situations. The use of robots to defuse roadside bombs, reducing the risk to human life, is clearly attractive both in political and humanitarian terms. So too are the futuristic biological enhancements Latiff describes, wired directly into the brain, that identify targets quickly and precisely ‘bypassing other slower bodily functions’ (i.e. sight, sound, and smell).¹⁷ The benefits of emerging technologies notwithstanding, there is also a ‘use it or lose it’ culture among war planners and politicians. Fewer casualties and the desire to downsize the military make robots a more politically attractive option in battle. Similarly attractive are the protective properties of emerging tech designed to respond swiftly to cyber threats. Greater autonomy enables machines such as the ‘Mayhem System’, a technology favoured by DARPA and described in *Army of None*, to detect vulnerabilities ‘before humans can spot them and develop either exploits or patches’.¹⁸ It is within this context that the allure of ceding human autonomy to machines grows ever stronger.

Let us briefly consider who benefits from the fetishisation of tech. In the civilian world, the ubiquity of cleverly marketed tech embodies the march of consumer capitalism. Studies on mobile phone acquisition conducted by the Pew Research Centre show their growing proliferation in emerging economies, e.g. in sub-Saharan Africa—not only in developed countries.¹⁹

Militaries and research institutions also clearly benefit from the advance of technology, and millions of government jobs depend on it. Latiff gives us figures: ‘with a total annual defence budget of 600 billion US dollars, the US spends close to 200 billion in research, development and testing and procurement of new systems’.²⁰ Furthermore, weapons are an important source of revenue: ‘in 2014

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15 Latiff, p. 82.

16 ‘Siri and Google Assistant Hacked in New Ultrasonic Attack’, *Naked Security by Sophos*, 2 March 2020.

17 Latiff, p. 113–14.

18 Scharre, p. 217–23.

19 ‘Technology Use in Africa’, *Pew Research Center*, 9 October 2018.

20 Latiff, p. 82.

the US sold more than 10 billion US dollars' worth of arms to other countries, whilst Russia sold almost 6 billion'.²¹ Technology has addictive fiscal benefits. In the civilian world, tech giants are also benefiting from the public craving for tech. Thanks to the Internet of Things—expanding rapidly to encompass over 20 billion connected devices—the contents of a household refrigerator can be monitored and replenished automatically with produce ordered online. However, more sinister applications have been widely reported, including, for example, explosive material being automatically triggered by a connected light switch or toaster.

Threat actors also benefit from the fetishisation of tech. Our attraction to the new gives anyone access to a vast civilian audience. The ubiquitous nature of digital data in everyday life provides an unprecedentedly large pool of potential recruits, and a global audience at which to target messages in an information war campaign. The circulation of images, many of them 'deep fakes' or altered in some way, add potency to a campaign. More data also offers the prospect of more targets. Devices connected via the Internet of Things are widely held to be particularly vulnerable to attack. These are but two of the unintended consequences of the contest for cutting-edge technology. Moreover, devices such as affordable and weaponised drones provide opportunities for threat actors to strike harder and farther.

As warfighting becomes more networked and less hierarchical, groups such as ISIS, al-Qaeda, and their affiliates, enjoy a strategic advantage without the rigid command structure of regular armies. This would appear to enable them to adapt more nimbly than state actors to new technological opportunities as they arise. Vertical government structures tend to impede adaptation to new challenges, or swift delivery of strategic counter-narratives.

What are the downsides?

Consider the following: speed combined with the fetishisation of tech has the effect of neutralising human decision making, which potentially undermines the ability of states to de-escalate crises. But the cost in human lives can be severe as the Patriot Missile incident, described at the start of this essay, illustrates. The mutually reinforcing qualities of speed and state-of-the-art tech threaten to reduce the human dimension of warfare. '[W]arfighting will exceed the

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²¹ Ibid.

capabilities of the human senses to collect and process data', argues Latiff.²² Furthermore, soldiers will likely find themselves agents, delivery systems, and recipients of exponentially growing volumes of data. This can be achieved through myriad enhancements, such as sensors tracking situational data and biological responses. '[T]he soldier of the future will be a collection of data points';²³ at the extreme, soldiers will become redundant on the battlefield owing to the limits of human processing capacity. Instead, AI-assisted machines will derive meaning from the data used to weigh decisions and calculate risks.

This has serious implications for how warfighting is conducted and how ordinary citizens are persuaded to consent to war; the long-standing codes of armed conflict are being challenged. If we do not wish to abandon human decision-making about going to war and fighting war, the reduction of the need for soldiers on the battlefield must be calibrated against a risk-reward scale that is constantly reviewed; decisions about each scenario must be context-specific and clearly communicated.

The principles of necessity, proportionality, and distinction enshrined in the laws of armed conflict have served as a brake on warfighting without limits. The emergence of unbridled tech evangelism and the allure of the new, coupled with new battle-spaces and inexorably faster speeds, threaten the nuanced judgement of human beings engaged in battle, our ability to distinguish friend from foe and to discern the intent of players on the battlefield. At the present time such beneficent human traits cannot be augmented by machines—they have not only served to temper warfare, but have also provided an accountability mechanism by setting agreed standards in international law, which if breached, subject the offending party to sanction. It is true that threat actors by and large fail to adhere to the laws of war, an argument that is often cited in defence of transgressions by states—the entities that establish those international codes in the first place.

Although in some instances armed groups have developed their own technologies (e.g. the parallel communications systems developed by drug cartels in Latin America), as a rule the main initiators of technological innovation are states and their commercial agents. Consequently, there has been an understanding among legitimate states that they should at least adhere to the agreed norms of war and the rules set forth in international treaties.

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²² Latiff, p. 113.

²³ Ibid., p. 42.

In future, limits on the ability of machines to replicate human judgement at speed may be overcome. Some scientists believe that within two decades a hypothetical future could be realised, in which machines evolve to have ‘Artificial General Intelligence’ characterised by the ability to execute the full range of cognitive tasks and, crucially, to understand context. Humanity would then face a choice regarding the application of evolved AI, the moral dilemma brought on by the realisation that ‘just because we can, doesn’t mean we should’. Ethics and judgement are human considerations; simply because science has taught us how to despatch lethal force at ever greater speeds with a limited need for human intervention, that does not mean such technology should be deployed. Normative decision making on matters of such great consequence surely cannot be relegated to an algorithm with its inherent biases.

It is in this capacity that the need for considered vision and strategic communications is surely greatest. But, according to Virilio, speed dictates the pace and the rules of the game. Somehow the value of slow communication (like that of slow food), needs to reclaim space in the public discourse and re-trench itself as a norm, if only in limited spheres. One size communication does not always fit all.

The technology of deterrence

The case for human mastery over science and speed is more pressing than ever. Untamed technological proliferation could lead to the dystopian future Virilio conjures up—a world where technology delivered at speed, rather than political deliberation, is the driving force behind war. Yet the concept of strategic restraint has stood the test of time and has particular utility now. Informed by the threat of a nuclear arms race during the Cold War, then need for speed hinges on a dynamic of mistrust—mistrust between competing states in a classical Realist world, characterised by anarchy, in which national interests and survival are paramount. When a state is susceptible to ‘first strike vulnerability’, adversaries have an incentive to launch pre-emptive attacks. Stability is achieved ‘when neither [state] in striking first can destroy the other’s ability to strike back’.²⁴ A contemporary example of this is the standoff in 2017 between North Korea, which was testing its intercontinental ballistic missiles, and the United States, which found its west coast within their range. In the context of emerging tech, strategic stability is achieved in the same way. However, in a future where

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²⁴ T. Schelling as cited by Scharre, p. 298.

autonomous weapons dominate and human beings are removed from decision making, is strategic stability thrown off balance? Not necessarily. If 'used in the right way', scholars agree, the automation of weaponry can provide greater safety, just as automatic brakes in cars do.

Furthermore, in terms of safety, there is a trade-off between humans reaching for the latest hypersonic technology and pausing to reflect on history and experience.

Latiff's experience as a US Air Force General, for whom innovation has provided a level of dominance, make his blunt observations about the fetishisation of tech compelling. His words are a sobering reminder to global decision-makers of the perils of embracing uncritically the latest technology, with its impact on global stability. He warns that the 'unbridled military adventurism' results in the 'loss of careful deliberation about the consequence of our actions';²⁵ he cites the protracted wars in Iraq and the 'disastrous forays into Somalia' as examples of such 'arrogance'.²⁶

Whilst debates about the speed of warfighting technology may be confined to academic, policy, and military circles, there is unquestionably a need for broader public debate about the parameters of tech-enabled knowledge and capabilities, and their place in achieving global stability. Yet that selfsame technology shapes the direction of debate online. Artificial intelligence tools, such as bots deployed on social media platforms, have the capacity to amplify narratives for online audiences beyond what they would ordinarily achieve in real world settings. This makes it possible for individuals holding similar views to converge on an idea, re-enforce their beliefs, and drown out contrary views. It enables disinformation campaigns by vested interests to travel at speed, leaving little room for rebuttal and retraction. That is not honest debate. But citizens' lack of trust in their governments in the 'post-truth era' is being weaponised or, at the very least, exploited. Having lost their role as gatekeepers to information and careful strategic communicators, governments are presented with a huge challenge. In the quest for authenticity (rather than balance and context) voices on social media platforms (real or 'bot') intensify the polarisation of political discourse. As social media gain parity with the traditional media, they gain currency in 'influencing national and ultimately Global Politics'.²⁷

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²⁵ Latiff, p. 125.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Bolt, 'Strategic Communications in Crisis'.

Still, traditional media can play a crucial role in counteracting polarisation and instability by injecting critical thought into debates about the possibilities and perils of emerging technology. Whilst warfighting may seem to be the domain of professional soldiers, the appropriation of emerging technology by threat actors contributes to a sense of urgency and shared responsibility because terrorists target civilians through acts of violence, cybercrime, and disinformation campaigns, aiming, for instance, to distort election campaigns or undermine traditional law enforcement through acts of digital vigilantism. Public broadcasters have an especially critical role to play in this regard; unencumbered by commercial interests, they can position themselves as transmitters of facts rather than peddlers of ‘click bait’—a term that has recently found its way into the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

The power of technology can be harnessed for human betterment and for the alleviation of suffering, but world leaders are driven to embrace the latest technological innovations under the pretext of global stability. Surely this needs to be kept in check. At the heart of all this is the question of trust—trust in technology’s promise to deliver a safer global environment, trust in the communication of that vision, and trust in global leaders to hold back from surrendering their decision-making powers to machines; not because they can but (to borrow Latiff’s phrase) because they must.

