



ART PROPAGANDA

SOCIAL INFLUENCE TECHNIQUE

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ABSTRACT

The effectiveness of using art as propaganda has been validated for hundreds and thousands of years and is considered to be a constant threat because one of the key objectives of information warfare is to distort public perception through propaganda and disinformation. This can damage a country's security system, especially when the dissemination of information is accompanied by suggestive images that can generate emotional reactions. It is therefore necessary to stimulate an increased need for knowledge in order to identify and define risks and vulnerabilities to national security, by developing a security culture among the population that actively contributes to strengthening the capacity to understand, prevent and control the factors that can result in disrupting our security situation. Active involvement at institutional level is therefore necessary to raise public awareness of forms of propaganda.

Keywords: art, propaganda, manipulation, threats, disinformation, intelligence services.

Art – A Strategic Means of Communication

Romania is a European country with an important geostrategic position, which is part of the strongest political-military alliance in history, being thus directly concerned by the evolution of security risks existing at international level. In today's society, the risks and vulnerabilities to national and individual security have a permanent dynamic, which requires increasing the need of knowledge for their identification and definition, through the development of a population-level security culture, which actively contributes to strengthen the capacity of understanding, preventing and controlling the factors that could contribute to the disruption of our security status.

The power of information has become as great as the power of weapons and tends to prevail in future political-military confrontations, and propaganda has always been used as a formidable weapon of war, which requires further attention on the ways in which it can act against legitimate national interests.

At the same time, art is increasingly prevailing in our lives and no matter what we do, we cannot avoid or ignore it. In addition to its cultural value, through this high public exposure, art can be the right environment for interaction between population and organizations (public or private).

It is difficult to imagine that associating art with propaganda can be considered an effective solution of psychological influence, which has been used since ancient times, but by analyzing known works of art from the perspective of their use as propaganda tools we can highlight the hypothesis that art can represent an important communication channel, which can be exploited as part of strategies aimed at promoting ideological messages.

National security, as a fundamental element of the existence of a state, can be impacted in the long term, in a subtle manner, sometimes hard to perceive, using art as a strategic means of communication, which can be controlled by raising the public awareness of the capacity of social influence that a work of art can acquire, by stimulating critical thinking and objective perception of the message transmitted through the work.

What is Art?

Art can be found through a variety of visual representations such as painting, sculpture, graphics, decorative art, photography or contemporary installations, but we will

mainly refer to painting, being one of the most complex forms of artistic manifestation, which evolved during thousands of years from cave painting, to the present abstract compositions, which testifies to the primordial human need for affective expression, to surround itself with beauty, to translate thoughts and messages through colors.

Appreciation of art does not require the acquisition of specialized knowledge, it is simply enough to look at a work in order for it to convey a state, a sensory perception, to challenge you intellectually, to want to understand more the meaning of the image.

Many books have been written about art, and there is still no definition that would encompass all its meanings, because, like human feelings, each individual has their own filters through which he/she sees and feels the world around him/her.

Looking at an artwork, we automatically enter the bridge that connects the visual to the verbal. What we see, we try to understand with words, and what we think it represents, relates to our own cultural and social perceptions. From here, we could outline the idea that art is like a form of illusion because, in reality, what we see are the strokes of color on the painting medium, the rest being made up of our intellectual and cognitive process that forms the image and assigns it a meaning.

Public Visibility

In contemporary society, art is more and more common, both in indoor spaces, such as those specifically intended for its display (museums, art galleries, auction houses, exhibition fairs), or in which man lives and works (in the intimacy of his own home or workplace), but also externally, in the form of monumental art or street art. Basically, interaction with art is almost inevitable.

The appetite for art can be observed statistically in the number of over 10 million visitors that the Louvre Museum in Paris had in 2018 (Marinescu, 2019). The photo below is relevant in this respect, showing the crowd willing to sacrifice their time and patience to get in touch with the artworks sought.

The increased interest in art has also generated the appearance of private museums, in which important collections come to the public's attention and carve the cultural landscape through the huge budgets allocated to acquisitions, the influence of the founders and their intense promotion (Brown, 2017).



Fig.1 People queue in front of the Pyramid of the Louvre.

These initiatives deserve the appreciation of art lovers because they bring, from the private area, into the public space, works unreachable until that time, as an addition to the state museum system. At first glance, normally should be an added value that culture receives, but in the absence of curatorial coordination with state institutions, deformation of national heritage values may occur, which future generations will assimilate, especially given the ability of the art to transmit messages with a strong impact on the public and which, in such private institutions, may especially reflect the interests, tastes or ideology of the founders and administrators.

The public visibility that art has today has reached impressive levels, becoming a platform of socialization built on a hot topic nowadays, practically a channel of communication between public or private institutions and people.

Art has an ongoing-increasing public exposure, regardless of what we consider: its decorative or investment value, its practical use (in psychological therapy, advertising campaigns, etc.) or art from a cultural and educational perspective. On the other hand, art has the ability to produce changes in human psychology, managing to influence our emotional state, which causes an influence on rational thinking and, implicitly, on the decisions we can take or the opinions we can have. Thus,

we can conclude that art is a very efficient communication channel, able to transmit messages with a strong impact on the public, both in direct, obvious forms, and in other subtler and more difficult to perceive manners.

Disseminating the Message through Art

Propaganda is a systematic action aimed at influencing or persuading an audience about a particular ideology, which may not be objective and may selectively present facts, to encourage perception and produce an emotional rather than rational response.

Propaganda can manipulate people's beliefs, attitudes, or actions through specially selected symbols, facts, and arguments that are presented in ways that are thought to have a strong impact on the perception of the message that is intended to be communicated, in order to create a social consensus.

Terence H. Qualter (1962) highlights the need for propaganda efficiency. The author believes that "propaganda, in order to be effective, must be seen, memorized, understood, and followed [...], and adapted to the particular needs of the situation and the audience

to which it is directed" (Qualter, 1962, p. xii). Thus, through lack of efficiency, the propaganda test turns into a simple little manipulation that does not produce significant effects in the cognition of the masses. In a modern view, propaganda is seen as "the deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist" (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2015, p. 7). In essence, propaganda is intended to show us what to believe and not how to reach our own conclusions, independently and fairly.

Propaganda is found throughout almost all media and forms of communication of society: art, television, literature, music, film, media or the internet (which is the most generous propaganda environment).

In history, propaganda did not have a negative connotation as it is perceived today, but was an honorable way to spread perceptions of appreciation or antipathy on such goals as trade campaigns, social debates or cultural debates. Through its use for political-military purposes, especially by fascist or communist regimes, the word propaganda has become stigmatized, which the world is watching out for, although the concept itself is still being used without embarrassment, both in peace and in wartime (Hentea, 2002).

Through its manifestations, propaganda mainly appeals to human emotions, and these have remained unchanged for thousands of years. Technological developments, however, have allowed the use of new types of communication tools that facilitate the dissemination of messages with expected effect on an increasingly large audience. This raises the importance

of propaganda as an element of social influence in contemporary society.

A propaganda campaign is carefully planned by characters who have the interest, strength and means to implement a mass-premeditated influence action, and this is difficult to do individually, having chances of success when carried out by an organized collective, which generally forms part of a state structure.

In Romania's Military Strategy, the inventory of the action means of the challenging powers of the current world order mentions first: the manipulation of information (Secretariatul General al Guvernului, 2021). In the same document, other challenges that would have the potential to manifest themselves in the form of security risks for the Romanian state are specified, such as: intensification of influential actions and information aggressions, as well as actions of hostile intelligence services, with the aim of destabilizing society, fragmentation of social cohesion, and increasing divergences of interests and opinion between different social or professional categories, against a background of reduced resilience to disinformation (Secretariatul General al Guvernului, 2021).

In a dynamic environment of international security, in which information wars take on new dimensions with the support of technological evolution, the propaganda phenomenon requires increased attention, both from state institutions and from the population, so that the objectives proposed by initiating these hostile actions can be realized and prevented.

Over time, art actively contributed to evoking an event, an idea or a representative character of the times,

in order to convey a message to viewers, and when the work was larger and more expressive, the story became more convincing.

Art, left as a historical testimony, gives us clues by which plastic artists would have produced works from ancient times at the command of kings, nobles or church representatives, who could choose the theme and the message they wanted to promote, with the interest of obtaining personal benefits of the image or results from the message they wanted to promote.

Ancient Egyptian frescoes are probably the earliest evidence of the use of painting as a means of propaganda, in which pharaohs are depicted on a larger scale than other characters, to emphasize their power (Roller, 2021).

Art can support the political and ideological opinions of organizations in the leadership of a state, serving as a tool for changing the existing political and social realities.

During the communist period, Romanian art was used by the totalitarian regime as an instrument of propaganda and, using the abuse of power, the party ideology was transposed into the creation of artists, who became indirectly biased in the formation of that society. The international exhibition participations were marked by a visible differentiation in the selection of the works presented outside the country, which had to promote a picture of Romania aligned with the West in all fields, such as industry, culture or art, compared to what could be seen in the exhibition spaces in the country. This strategy was allegedly understood by artists, who would come to play a role as double agents (Barcan et al., 2018).

Art Propaganda, Implications for National Security

In today's society, terms such as propaganda, psychological/media/information war, promotional campaign, and others are part of our common language and we use them mostly with a negative connotation, because we feel that someone is trying to influence what we think or feel and especially important decisions we make.

Art propaganda is a component of the mechanism of this unconventional war and these programs are elaborated with extreme rigor in terms of the image structure that is used for the purpose of transmitting the proposed message. In this respect, it must simultaneously correspond to certain representation requirements, such as page layout, visual language transmitted, color used (red

and yellow predominated in all communist propaganda images, stimulating sexual and combative pulsation).

National security is a public asset valued by the citizens of any state, and its stability depends on how the population relates to the dynamics of risks, vulnerabilities and threats in a dynamic climate. One of the key objectives of information warfare is to distort the perception of the population through propaganda and disinformation, which can damage the security system of a country, especially when the dissemination of information is accompanied by suggestive images, which can generate emotional reactions (David, 2018).

The artwork has the capacity to store a large amount of information, being able to influence, orient and change perceptions, and through technological development, it can be multiplied into millions of copies, thus becoming a true channel of mass communication. According to historian Călin Hentea (2004), precisely because of its ubiquity, respectability, and persuasiveness, the artwork can be recorded today, with maximum efficiency, in the long-time information arsenal (Hentea, 2004).

CASE STUDY

Intelligence Services and Art Propaganda

Until the Second World War, there was no significant artistic trend in the United States, and most American artists had a conservative approach to their work, but after this period, the world of art turned its attention to the new world capital of art, New York, where artists such as Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Willem de Kooning, who were painting in a radical and new style, gave rise to the artistic trend: abstract expressionism (Modern art was CIA 'weapon', 1995).

It was remarkable the speed with which the current reached international fame, in the late 1940s, quickly gaining notoriety and respect. In the 1950s, it was accepted that new world art trends were taking place in New York rather than Paris. In 1957, the Metropolitan Museum in New York paid an unprecedented amount of money for a painting by a contemporary artist at the time, namely \$30,000 for *Fall Rhythm*, signed by Jackson Pollock.

Abstract expressionism became an art movement with international exposure, well represented by American



Fig.2 The Pharaoh Tutankhamun destroying his enemies. Note: photograph of a painting on wood of the Pharaoh Tutankhamun destroying his enemies located in the Egyptian Museum of Cairo. Source: www.historyhit.com/entrance-tutankhamens-tomb-found/



Fig.3 Fall Rhythm. Note: photograph of Pollock's painting located in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Source: www.bbc.com/culture/article/20161004-was-modern-art-a-weapon-of-the-cia

cultural institutions, and in some circles of the art world, there were rumors that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was directly involved in supporting modern art, using it as a tool of propaganda against the Soviet Union, which, in the late 1940s, spent \$250 million annually on communist propaganda.

The decision to include culture and art in the US Cold War arsenal was taken as soon as the CIA was established in 1947, and the Propaganda Assets Inventory division was formed, which at its operational height had the capacity to influence over 800 newspapers, magazines and public information organizations (Modern art was CIA 'weapon', 1995).

Abstract expressionism conveys a strong message of the freedom of expression, creativity, intellectual freedom and cultural power of the USA, in contrast to the socialist realism imposed by the Soviets, which aimed to harness the party's beliefs, to glorify communist leaders, and was supposed to present life in the totalitarian regime exclusively from a pro-state perspective. One example of this is the contribution that the CIA has made to the creation and funding of the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), an anti-communist organization, which included intellectuals, writers, historians, poets, artists and was run by a CIA agent. The Congress for Cultural Freedom was involved in a visible way in promoting American contemporary art by funding the most important art exhibitions. CCF is known to have been active in 35 countries, including the UK, where it launched the popular Encounter magazine.

The Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA), with the support of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, has launched a one-year exhibition tour of

major European cities, including Basel, Berlin, Brussels, Milan, Paris and London, to promote the exhibition "The New American Painting". It was assumed that Tate Gallery could not afford to insure the costs of the exhibition in London, so the American millionaire Julius Fleischmann sponsored this (Modern art was CIA 'weapon', 1995). Fleischmann was the president of the Fairfield Foundation, which was funded by the CIA (Modern art was CIA 'weapon', 1995).

The most representative exhibitions organized with the support of the Congress for Cultural Freedom were: Modern Art in the United States in 1955 or the special titled Masterpieces of the Twentieth Century, in 1952.

If we consider that the American art market currently has a share of more than one third of the global sales, which represents billions of dollars of revenues annually, amounts which should be of interest for the economic security of the state, the American Intelligence Service also envisaged the economic objective by promoting American contemporary art, in addition to the ideological propaganda component (Dasal, 2020).

American President Dwight Eisenhower himself (1890-1969) stated at the time:

"as long as our artists are free to create with sincerity and conviction, there will be a healthy controversy and progress in art. How different it is in tyranny, when artists are turned into slaves and tools of the state! When artists become the chief propagandas of a cause, progress is arrested, and creation and genius are destroyed" (The Conspiracy of Art, 2021).

This message from the leader of the United States confirms the strategy of the American Intelligence



Fig.4 The New American Painting as shown in eight European countries - 1958-1959. Note: photograph of a painting exhibition located in the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Source: www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1990

Service to dominate the war of propaganda by art against communists, especially since later, in the 1960s, the same President blamed the moral decline of modern American art and the crazy twist dance.

It is important to note that the success of abstract expressionism would have occurred without the support of the American Intelligence Service, but it is not possible to determine the actual extent of this trend and the time frame in which this would have been achieved, but this technique of social influence, which was organized by the CIA, seems to have worked.

Using Art as Propaganda in Wartime

We are all witnessing in this period the most important military conflict since the Second World War, the war started by Russia against Ukraine, which is being conducted both in trenches and in psychological form, propaganda being intensely used through false accounts on social networks, falsified documents, videos and manipulated images.

The role that art has in this process is an important one for maintaining high morale among the population, for motivating the armies, but also for protesting against this war and the horrors that are committed among civilians.

Artists who support both sides created custom art or of their own desire for active and non-violent involvement in the fight, and many of these works were distributed in the public space, being now known all over the world, especially when famous contemporary artists directly showed their support for the Ukrainian people.

One such example is the British anonymous artist, Banksy, who created a few murals on the walls of war-torn buildings in Ukraine, whose messages, loaded with meaning and intelligence, have a powerful impact on the public. His creation, on the wall of a kindergarten destroyed by Russian missiles, depicts a child who takes down an adult in a judo battle, the image being an affront to Vladimir Putin (sport champion) and referring to David's biblical fight with Goliath, symbolizing also the difference between the two-armed powers (Howie, 2022).



Fig.5 Banksy- style mural in Borodyanka, Ukraine. Note: photograph of Banksy's mural art, MyArtBroker. Source: www.myartbroker.com/artist-banksy/articles/new-banksy-mural-for-ukraine-2022

Art propaganda in this war calls for the use of symbols or images associated with positive emotions, to convey them in the form of emotions to people or to promote the ideology of the state among them. For

example, the image of the Kremlin was used to associate their actions with national pride, while Ukraine used images of Ukrainian soldiers and the national flag to associate their cause with heroism.



Fig.6 Mural painting depicting the hands of a Ukrainian soldier repairing the national flag. Source: <https://romania.europalibera.org/arta-propaganda-inspiratie-artistica-razboi-ucraina/32091626.html>

With the support of the Kiev Government, an international art exhibition was made, in which, since the beginning of the war, works of art made by 50 contemporary artists from Ukraine have been exhibited in major European capitals (Berlin, Rome, Amsterdam, Brussels), continuing with New York, Washington, and San Francisco, an official endeavor to present the cruel

reality of the war, as the Ukrainian people feel every day. One of the most impressive works is by Daria Koltsova, who sculpted faces of children screaming, one for each child killed. The impact on the public was strong, for example, in Berlin, there were people leaving the exhibition in tears (Rankin, 2022).



Fig.7 Daria Koltsova's clay heads. Source: www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/31/ukrainian-war-art-exhibition-arrives-brussels-captured-house

Conclusion

Art is a complex field, encompassing a variety of concepts such as creativity, imagination, esthetics, and public communication, and access to art has become inevitable in contemporary society, manifesting an effect on each of us.

Through the ability of art to convey messages, which remain active in the long term and are addressed to the masses of people, appealing to emotion at the expense of reason, art becomes power. When this power is controlled and exploited by actors interested in influencing opinions and making decisions appropriate to their own interests, through art a risk to national security can be generated from the perspective of propaganda.

The effectiveness of using art as propaganda has been validated for hundreds and thousands of years, and this is considered to be a constant threat, currently

supported by the development of technology, which facilitates access to information, but also the depth of specialized studies about psychology, which makes progress on understanding human behavior and ways in which it can be influenced.

Propaganda or mass influence attempt, as it is differently named, will have a growing trend in the future, both in the military world and in the civilian world, especially since the multitude of documentary sources that we currently have access to, do not guarantee that we are more informed, more knowledgeable and better protected informationally.

In this situation two perspectives should be considered: active involvement at institutional level in raising awareness of the forms of propaganda among the population and establishing our own sets of values through which we can objectively analyze the messages received through public communication channels, which also include art.

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