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# Psyops in an Ever-changing World: The Age of Influencers

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Many political scientists, strategists and experts of various kind argue that fake news are the greatest and most lethal feature of today's hybrid warfares. They are right, partly. Social media and social networks are proving themselves incredibly destabilisation-powered, from the way they can be used to coordinate civil unrests and revolution to the way they can be used to spread fake news, a term used by laymen to portray in one word the more complex phenomenon of disinformation.

Today's and tomorrow's wars are being fought – and will be fought – in the cyberspace and the reason is not merely tied to the digitization of activities, services, finance, stock exchanges, critical infrastructures, public databases, command centres, and so on. People themselves are getting digital, namely they are increasingly less exposed to reality due to deep impact of e-commerce, smart working, and to the rise of social networks.

The war went digital not because of the military or of the finance but because people are losing the contact with real life and up to the point where they spend much more time on their phones and computers, checking and updating constantly their Facebook or their Instagram, than on having a walk or doing something free from technology.

Technology- and internet-addicted users experience many negative repercussions, [especially on psyche, creativity and intelligence](#), and they end up being trapped by their cyber-life. The most important aspect to us is not how the internet is damaging people's health but how the States can use it to advance their interests.

There is a reason why this analysis has been opened by speaking of the so-called fake news: experts are so alarmed by them that no one is paying attention to the other aspects of the internet era potentially employable to carry out psychological operations (pysops). I'm speaking of the so-called influencers, people who make their fortune by promoting goods and by selling their truths and stories to their followers – millions of followers.

Everyone can be an influencer: actors, musicians, sportsmen, bloggers, world-travellers, reporters, writers, super-models, ordinary people with no particularly relevant qualities and skills – like good-looking men and women taking photos randomly in attractive places. The influencer creates a need, and other times he/she fills a vacuum, and then he/she makes money via sponsors, views, events, and so on.

Influencers have always existed but there is a huge difference between present-day and past influencers. Indeed, the advent of a popularity-addicted mass society – the global village where everyone can be famous for at least five minutes – has meant impersonality, standardization, homogenization, conformity, in other terms: zombification.

People now tend to trust more education-free influencers than politicians and experts, with the latter trusted by more educated people and with the influencers followed, loved and celebrated by the younger generations.

The natural conclusion of the aforementioned points is the following: in the 2020s if a State does want to advance its own interests and convince the public opinion to accept something, like an economic reform or a cultural agenda, must rely on the help of these seemingly unreliable allies, the influencers.

Present-day influencers are no Aristotle, they are trappers, they cook, they teach people how to take a photo, or they simply show how much money they possess or how many women they can have; nonetheless they have great popular followings and they tend to develop relations with the followers based on emotional identification and involving very often some cults of personality. Furthermore, due to the fact they live for, on and by the internet, they have a profile on every social media and social network, accordingly they can reach very large audiences in a few minutes. In short, these God-like ordinary people venerated by the mass society are the true key to win today's and tomorrow's hybrid warfares.

The so-called VIPs (Very Important People) belonging to Hollywood and to the music system are being exploited with very positive outcomes by the American liberal intelligentsia since the late 1990s and early 2000s. The social and cultural importance of people with no political nor cultural background is of an ever-growing nature and has shown its effects during the American presidential elections of 2016 and 2020, where the entire Hollywood invited cinema-goers to boycott Donald Trump and took the lead in many circumstances, like the during the George Floyd protests.

Israel and Saudi Arabia are two other examples of countries which have understood the paradigm shift and have mobilised their bloggers, actors, singers and influencers to make their public opinion accept the Arab-Israeli normalization. And it's working.

Also China may have used actors to promote its own agenda. Very popular Chinese-American actors like Jackie Chan and Jet Li, after years in Hollywood, have used their popularity to justify the Chinese Communist Party's agenda, from foreign goals to anti-drugs campaigns, in the eyes of younger generations.

Russia, where a top-down mass nationalization process is underway, should seriously consider to approach singers, actors, sportspeople and influencers to achieve its goals faster and better. In fact, these people are followed and trusted by the younger generations much more than politicians and clergy, this is why their support will prove fundamental in the next years. Let's only think about the very great popular following surrounding people like the MMA fighter Khabib Nurmagomedov.

Not every State has understood the importance of conquering the influencer world: the EU, for instance, is lacking such an awareness. There are some actors and musicians criticizing some political parties or trying to promote some cultural agendas – like the light drugs legalization – but these can't be read, and probably they are not, as government-controlled psyops.

A forward-looking State must be aware of the pivotal role that influencers may play in terms of brainwashing and it should approach some of them or even set up some influencer-forming programs within the secret services with the goal of giving rise to government-controlled influencers – as Israel and Saudi Arabia are doing. They would spread disinformation, that is fake news, and influence the public opinion on a large scale and they would do so much better than media and troll armies, because the mass society – the mass society's members, not the brainy people – tends to mistrust mainstream media and politicians but ignores of being brainwashed on a daily basis by music, television, cinema, pop culture, entertainment and influencers.

Putting aside for a moment the influencers, how should a disinformation campaign be designed?

The following is extracted by *The Art of Secret War*, my BA thesis-turned-book, and is aimed at helping both policy-makers and ordinary people understand the reality and importance of psyops in the contemporary era.

“Italy's gray eminence Licio Gelli used to say that the true power is in the hands of mass media owners – he was right.

The psychological warfare carried out through the media system is the cornerstone of destabilization and the reason is pretty simple: news, shows and programmes don't serve the mere purpose of entertainment but play a key-role in the formation of beliefs, opinions and world visions – on the basis of which people choose to act and to vote, conform their behaviour and take decisions.

There is a social stratification in the information system according to which news and facts are perceived differently and even the quantity-quality ratio varies significantly:

1. Information illiterates; they represent the very tiny minority with no access to the media system, often based in the most remote areas of a country.

2. Consumers; they represent the vast majority of the population in advanced societies (on average 75%–85%), they are those who read newspapers, listen to radios, watch television and surf the Internet.

3. Orientators; they are charismatic and savant people who enjoy some popular following and exert some cultural influence, such as religious leaders, politicians, thinkers, civic activists. They play a primary role within the target audience, and within the society as a whole, as their followers tend to associate them with credibility and trustworthiness.

4. Information operators; they are the media system's workers, such as reporters, journalists, and opinionists.

5. Decision-makers; they are those who decide which news are to be made public and the way to inform consumers about facts. Consequently, they have the power to manipulate the reality to the detriment of consumers and often they act in opposition to the orientators

Psyops aim at infiltrating the media system, more specifically they target the information operators and decision-makers with the goals of misleading consumers and contrasting the potential anti-fake news campaigns staged by orientators.

What here it will be dubbed “media terrorism” is the most efficient instrument usable to mislead opinions, beliefs and feelings of the consumers. Disinformation campaigns based on the non-stop spreading of the so-called fake news are capable of distorting profoundly reality and of making it appear as the strategist desires.

Information operators can be bought, id est corrupted, or deceived by means of specialized figures such as the so-called <<deep throats>>, namely informants whose role is to share sensitive information about important people, such as politicians and big entrepreneurs, susceptible to make a scandal and destroy their reputation – this operation is called <<character assassination>>. It's not important the reliability of the tip, but its potential to shock the public opinion and to spread fast.

There is a Russian term used to define such sensitive documents: <<компромаат>>, abbreviation of <<компрометирующий материал>>, which literally means compromising material. Furthermore, the reporter's commitment to

seek the truth can be easily hindered by resorting to tactics like the <<environmental intoxication>>, that is the non-stop propagation of discordant news and multiple versions of the same fact, or the <<siege>>, that is a particularly aggressive form of environmental intoxication.

The rise of Internet and new social media made it possible to perfect these tactics and to increase the power of disinformation; for instance, it's possible to reach millions of people in a few minutes with a video posted on YouTube or Facebook. To this regard it's noteworthy to underline the role played by Western social networks and mass media in shaping the beliefs of the global public opinion about the Syrian civil war or in having fed the Arab Springs.

But let's go more in-depth with some topics.

*How do we understand if a character assassination is underway?* The only thing to do is to pay attention to the timing of scandals and the spread of fake news. Timing is everything.

*How does it work the infiltration of media?* Everyone can be a journalist, a reporter or a blogger, no matter the educational qualification. For this reason it's also possible and easy-to do the infiltration of “agents” inside an editorial staff or the creation out of nothing of newspapers which will work as fake news-spreading troll factories.

In the vast majority of developed and developing countries, ordinary citizens are granted the right to establish sources of information by their own and the media system is often more in the hands of private owners than in those of the governments. This pluralistic context facilitates significantly the establishment of fake news-spreading troll factories but it also facilitates the infiltration of existing and much followed newspapers.

It's very common the infiltration-for-transformation, namely the conversion of some mass media from neutral sources to politically-aligned entities. Furthermore, newspapers and TV channels usually don't require the participation to contests to enter the editorial staff or the management, thus it's possible to influence hirings or bottom-up carrers of disinformation agents.

After having explained how the infiltration works now it's time to explain how disinformation works.

Media terrorism can take off initially only at one condition: it mustn't spread unbelievable fake news coming from unreliable sources. The fake news must be both plausible and convincing, mixing truth and lies. This is the only viable way for new-born troll factories or existing-but-infiltrated newspapers not to lose reliability and to convince the consumers.



Only after having gained some popular following and credit, the disinformation machine can start high frequency psyops capable of mass manipulation and demoralization by means of media terrorism, semantic and information wars.

It doesn't really matter if a news is clearly misleading and fake, people will believe in it according to the pace of diffusion and the way is broadcasted from one media to another. *Do the most important mass media of your country spread disinformation?* After reading these pages you may be able to answer yourself. And if the answer is “yes”, ask yourself who might be the mastermind of that infiltration, on which foreign-linked paybook they might be and take every news very carefully since everybody is a possible a troll factory.

Now, let's have a look at the content which is usually spread by the chaos agents. If the target is a specific person, we may probably be witnesses of character assassination plots based on hate campaigns, demonization, alleged sex scandals and frauds.

If the target is a government as a whole, we may probably be witnesses of witch hunt-style sieges based on the non-stop diffusion of fake news, polarizing propaganda, false accusations, starting of controversial police investigations about alleged crimes involving leading politicians, against the background of a media-fueled allarmism about likely-coming economic crises and Fascist coups.

The siege will not cease until the goal is achieved and, as we'll see in the chapters dedicated to Chile and Guatemala, it's capable of creating such a social polarization to bring the targeted country on the brink of a civil war. This might happen because psyops are often carried out against the background of the simultaneous use of other destabilizing instruments, such as fifth columns-originated political and social violence, false flag operations, economic warfare, sabotages, and so on.



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