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Framing Effects and Public Perception

ANALYZING THE RHETORIC OF POLITICAL DISINFORMATION

Introduction

Contemporary communication diverges substantially from traditional paradigms, as it is increasingly influenced by novel factors and technological tools. Traditional public communication predominantly relied on the actions of politicians, journalists, and institutions, such as corporations, which strategically crafted topics and opinions presented in the media. Currently, the media cover a much wider spectrum—it is not only radio, newspapers or television, but also the Internet, which allows anyone with access to the network to co-create a communication space. Consequently, contemporary communication has garnered significant attention across diverse disciplines, including sociology, political science, linguistics, and communication and information studies. Their common goal is to better understand new forms of communication and to determine how public opinion is shaped, which is increasingly expressed in social media.¹

¹ S. Stieglitz, L. Dang-Xuan, *Social Media and Political Communication—A Social Media Analytics Framework*, “Social Network Analysis and Mining”, 2014, vol. 3, 1277–1291, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13278-012-0079-3>, 1–2.

Disinformation is the result of both the growing number of communication channels and the departure from traditional media. The increased amount of data and materials subjected to media analysis forces researchers to take into account additional factors, such as individual opinions, worldviews, and the way people create social relationships. These factors contribute to linguistic inconsistencies, misinterpretations of messages—particularly when stripped of their cultural context—and exacerbate the volatile dynamics of social media. In response to these challenges, advanced media analysis tools are being developed to help reduce the risk of disinformation.² Thanks to the easy access to the Internet and mobile devices such as smartphones, information can be transmitted in real time, which makes every network user a potential sender of content. For this reason, the importance of verifying information and ensuring its reliability is growing. Disinformation has emerged as a critical challenge for modern societies, endangering not only the integrity of public discourse but also political and social stability. Although the phenomenon of disinformation can occur in various contexts and concern many countries and organizations, in this article we will focus on examples of Russia's disinformation activities, which have been particularly visible in recent years. By leveraging modern technologies and social media, Russia effectively manipulates information to shape public opinion domestically and internationally, thereby destabilizing political processes on both fronts. In this context, one of the main tools used by Russia in its information warfare is framing, i.e. giving a specific context to events and facts in order to manipulate the perception of these facts by recipients.

The article will present selected examples of Russian disinformation, illustrating how framing techniques are used to shape public opinion, create false narratives, and influence the perception of reality in Western countries. The main disinformation frames used by Russia, their goals and mechanisms, and their

² Stieglitz, Dang-Xuan, *Social Media and Political Communication...*, 5.

impact on societies and international politics will be discussed. Although disinformation is a global phenomenon, Russia's information warfare strategy is an example of a specific use of these techniques to pursue its political interests.

Framing

The concept of framing, first formulated in the 1970s, has gained importance as a key tool in the analysis of contemporary media messages. The term was introduced by sociologist Erving Goffman, who defined framing as a mechanism that allows individuals to organize and interpret the surrounding reality. Goffman defined frames as “constructs that enable people to interpret objects and events”.³ In his approach, frames are cognitive structures that organize stimuli from the environment in a way that allows them to be understood and integrated with previous knowledge. In other words, frames are mental schemas that are based on words, images, and experiences encoded in an individual's memory. Activation of specific frames allows the mind to link new situations with previous experiences, which not only facilitates their interpretation but also supports cognitive processes such as memorization and learning. In this way, framing is a key element in the information processing process, conditioning the way recipients understand and respond to various content.

Framing assumes a pivotal role in contemporary media, functioning as a fundamental mechanism for shaping audience perceptions. In the media context, framing refers to the way information is constructed, presented and interpreted, which significantly shapes its reception by society. The contemporary definition of framing, developed by J.N. Capella and K.H. Jamieson, among others, describes it as “the way in which a given story has

³ E. Goffman, *Analiza ramowa. Esej z organizacji doświadczenia*, tłum. S. Burdziej, Kraków: Zakład Wydawniczy “Nomos”, 2010, 10.

been written, presented and even produced”.⁴ This approach highlights the evolution of this concept in response to the dynamic development of information technologies and media, which play an increasingly important role in shaping the social perception of reality. This means that framing not only reflects, but also actively influences our understanding of the world, modeling the way we interpret the events surrounding us. In the digital context, where media content becomes more complex and multi-channel, the importance of framing increases, making its analysis a key element of research on contemporary communication.

Ultimately, the way the media organizes and presents events has a direct impact on the interpretation of reality, which emphasizes the importance of this concept in the analysis of the impact of media on society. Framing plays a key role in contemporary media, influencing the way information is presented and received by recipients. The media often use this technique to present a specific issue, character or political party in a specific light, which directly affects the perception of the recipients.⁵ This mechanism is based on the use of key words, images and other elements that evoke specific associations in the recipient’s mind. It should be noted, however, that words themselves do not constitute frames, but can activate mental frames existing in the mind of an individual. These frames are cognitive schemes that organize our thinking about reality, influencing the way in which incoming information is interpreted. If the sender of the message has knowledge about the mechanisms of frames, he can consciously choose communication elements, such as language or images, to more effectively activate specific frames in the recipient’s mind. This approach allows for precise generation of the intended effect,

⁴ M. A. Cacciatore, D. A. Scheufele, S. Iyengar, *The End of Framing as We Know It... and the Future of Media Effects*, “Mass Communication and Society”, 2016, vol. 19, 8.

⁵ S. R. Bawazier, L. Nurhajati, *The Media Framing of the Selfie between Miss Israel and Miss Lebanon from CNN and BBC towards the Political Interest*, “Kajian Ilmu Komunikasi”, 2018, vol. 48, nr 2, 200–201.

which makes framing a powerful tool of influence. In this way, the media can not only provide information, but also direct the way in which recipients understand the presented issues.

The appropriate construction of the message allows the media to both subtly and deliberately shape the perception of recipients, often leading to the adoption of the perspective set by the sender of the message. Thus, framing becomes one of the fundamental elements of media strategies, the aim of which is to influence public opinion and direct it in the desired direction. Through conscious design of content, the media can effectively model the way reality is perceived, which emphasizes the importance of this phenomenon in the context of contemporary social communication. Framing in the media plays a key role in shaping the way in which information is transmitted and interpreted by recipients, and its mechanism is closely related to the concept of bias. This bias can result from both social and psychological conditions, manifesting itself in a distorted presentation of reality, which is intended to evoke a specific reaction among recipients. In this context, framing becomes a tool that allows the media to select and highlight selected aspects of reality, which significantly affects the perception of information by society.

Framing is most often analyzed in relation to political issues, where it plays a central role in shaping public opinion. This is related to the growing participation of society in political processes, especially in the context of the dynamic development of the media. Research on framing includes both the analysis of individual elements of frames (e.g. language, metaphors, narratives) and the assessment of their impact on recipients and the way they are formulated.

One of the most important contributions to this field is the work of G. Lakoff,⁶ who draws attention to the role of metaphors in shaping moral attitudes and thus social and political actions. His research shows how metaphorical frames can influence the

⁶ G. Lakoff, *Don't Think of an Elephant! Know Your Values and Frame the Debate*, Chelsea Green Publishing Co., Vermont 2014.

way people understand and react to political issues. Another important aspect of framing research is the so-called argumentative turn, discussed by Fischer and Gottweis, among others. According to this concept, political ideas, frames and narratives are perceived as social constructions that give meaning to various elements of reality. At the same time, they provide analytical tools for understanding how power structures are created, perpetuated and reproduced. As a result, framing not only organizes the perception of the audience, but also constitutes an important element of the analysis of political processes, showing how media and communication affect power relations and social structure.

Framing, as a mechanism closely related to media bias, plays an important role in the process of selecting and interpreting information, which allows broadcasters to effectively model the narrative. Using various types of bias – from distortion bias, through preferential treatment of one side of the conflict (content bias), to decisions resulting from the journalists' personal beliefs (decision-making bias) – the media not only report events, but also actively influence the way they are understood by society.⁷ In this context, framing becomes a tool that allows for controlling the narrative and shaping the perception of the audience. This mechanism, especially in relation to politics, is closely related to the social and psychological processes that condition the way information is received. As researchers such as G. Lakoff and Fischer and Gottweis have pointed out, media frames not only structure the perception of reality, but also reflect and reproduce power structures, which makes them a key element of communication strategies. As a result, framing is not limited to describing reality, but becomes an active factor in its creation, influencing social attitudes, political decisions and the overall dynamics of public opinion.

To sum up, framing in the media combines aspects of information selection and its interpretation in a way that shapes the social understanding of the world. By using framing mechanisms,

⁷ R. M. Entman, *Framing Bias: Media in the Distribution of Power*, "Journal of Communication", 2007, vol. 57, 163.

the media have the ability not only to inform, but also to influence the way recipients perceive and interpret the phenomena surrounding them. In the digital era, where information flows quickly and its form is often simplified, the analysis of framing takes on particular importance, emphasizing the need for a critical approach to media messages and their impact on society.

Framing and Rhetoric

It is necessary to emphasize the connection between rhetoric and framing in the context of contemporary public debate, where both concepts interpenetrate. Rhetoric, in a broad sense, deals with the study of the way people communicate, analyzing both the language and the persuasive techniques used in various contexts. It includes, among others, the analysis of the structure of the message and its impact on the recipients. The key goal of rhetoric is to effectively persuade using three main elements: logical arguments (*logos*), the credibility of the sender (*ethos*), and the impact on the emotions of the recipient (*pathos*).⁸

From this basic definition it follows that rhetoric and framing are related. Both of these mechanisms work together, because the way in which the sender "frames" a given topic determines the selection of rhetorical means of communication. Framing affects the structure of the narrative, indicating which aspects of the topic should be emphasized and which should be omitted. In rhetorical terms, framing can be understood as the intentional construction and presentation of a situation designed to shape recipients' decisions and perceptions regarding a particular issue.⁹ Thus, framing

⁸ I. Stucki, F. Sager, *Aristotelian Framing: Logos, Ethos, Pathos and the Use of Evidence in Policy Frames*, "Policy Sciences", 2018, vol. 51, nr 3, 373–385, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48722301>, 375.

⁹ D. Chang, R. Chen, E. Krupka, *Rhetoric matters: A social norms explanation for the anomaly of framing*, "Games and Economic Behavior", 2019, vol. 116, 158–178, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geb.2019.04.011>, 2.

becomes a tool supporting rhetoric, enabling precise modeling of the message in order to produce a specific effect. The cooperation of these two concepts in public debate emphasizes the importance of skillful use of language and persuasive techniques in communication processes, especially in the context of influencing recipients and shaping their attitudes.

Framing and rhetoric in the practice of media and public communication complement each other, creating coherent strategies for influencing recipients. For instance, when the media or a speaker employs framing that emphasizes a threat, such as in the context of climate change, the rhetoric capitalizes on fear, utilizing dramatic language to evoke a sense of urgency and the imperative for action. In the case of positive framing, such as a narrative about technological development, the rhetoric can use optimism and excitement, emphasizing benefits and potential progress. In this approach, framing can be seen as the foundation on which the rhetorical strategy is based. The sender, using framing, decides which aspects of reality will be emphasized and which will be omitted, while rhetoric selects means of expression that strengthen these frames and make them more convincing.¹⁰ An example of such a combination would be describing an armed conflict as a “war for peace” instead of an “invasion.” This type of framing based on ethical values, such as the defense of freedom or human rights, can be additionally reinforced by rhetoric emphasizing the moral and humanitarian justification of actions.

In the simplest definition, framing is a way of presenting a message that “frames” the recipient, shaping their interpretation and achieving intended goals. In this context, rhetoric, with its references to culture, metaphors, symbols, or emotions, naturally fits into the mechanisms of framing. This is particularly visible in the case of political campaigns, which use public speeches rich in arguments, cultural references, symbols and metaphors that evoke emotions. Similar elements are characteristic of well-pre-

¹⁰ Stucki, Sager, *Aristotelian Framing...*, 381.

pared media messages. Examples include the use of expert speeches supporting the presented narrative, dramatic or joyful music, images related to similar events that strengthen the emotionality of the message and emphasize its social significance.¹¹

In this way, framing and rhetoric become interdependent tools that together shape the way recipients perceive and experience the content presented to them. Framing is based on cognitive frames, which, when properly activated, can significantly influence social opinions and actions. In this context, the approach of George Lakoff is crucial, who argued that frames are metaphors deeply rooted in the human mind. According to Lakoff, metaphors are the basic tool of framing. When building public speeches or other forms of communication, the sender refers to both known concepts and tries to simplify new, unknown issues, making the message more understandable for the recipient. Lakoff called this mechanism "metaphorical framing", which consists in presenting complex or abstract issues in categories that are more familiar and easier to understand. This method is particularly often used in communication concerning social problems that have the potential to shape the attitudes and actions of recipients.¹²

The key element influencing the effectiveness of framing is the way in which the frames are presented and adapted to the recipient. In this context, an inseparable aspect of framing analysis is the element of rhetoric, especially in relation to political frames. Framing plays an important role in shaping specific attitudes and political decisions in a given society. Rhetoric, as a linguistic tool, plays a supporting role in this process, enabling more effective modeling of the message. This can be observed in particular in political campaigns, where politicians use rhetoric to convince voters to their programs, parties or visions of the future. The most

¹¹ Stucki, Sager, *Aristotelian Framing...*, 376–377.

¹² K. Stadnik, *Metafory pojęciowe dotyczące zdrowia psychicznego w trakcie pandemii COVID-19 w Polsce*, "Horyzonty Wychowania", 2021, vol. 20, nr 55, 75.

commonly used techniques in such cases refer to the classical principles of rhetoric defined by Aristotle: *logos* (logical arguments), *ethos* (authority and cultural symbols) and *pathos* (emotional appeal). These three elements form the foundation of most public political speeches. Political arguments, such as economic plans or reform proposals, are based on *logos*. *Ethos* is built through references to national or cultural values and symbols that increase the credibility of the sender. In turn, *pathos* evokes emotions that are crucial for engaging the recipient and consolidating the desired effect. It is worth noting, however, that the arguments used in such messages are not always supported by evidence or credible sources of information. The use of emotions, symbolism, and simplifications in rhetoric can lead to manipulation, making framing both a powerful and potentially problematic tool of influence.¹³

In this regard, another common point can be seen between framing and rhetoric. Both of these phenomena focus on making a given message convincing and influential for the recipient. In the case of rhetoric, the goal is to use appropriate linguistic and persuasive means, which are intended to strengthen arguments and affect the emotions of the listeners. Similarly, framing, by selecting and presenting specific aspects of reality, directs the recipient's perception in the desired direction. It is worth emphasizing, however, that although both rhetoric and framing serve to manipulate the message, they are based on different theoretical and methodological foundations. Thanks to this, they allow for a different analysis and interpretation of the same content. In this context, special attention should be paid to the phenomenon of political disinformation, which is gaining strength in the digital age. Disinformation, used both in rhetoric and framing, is one of the most dangerous tools of manipulation in the public space, and its effects can have far-reaching consequences for society and politics.

¹³ Stucki, Sager, *Aristotelian Framing...*, 374–375.

The Phenomenon of Political Disinformation in the Digital Age

In an era of dynamic technological development and universal access to information, representatives of democratic states are facing the growing threat of disinformation, a phenomenon that is becoming increasingly common and dangerous. According to the definition of disinformation proposed by representatives of the European Commission, disinformation is defined as "verifiably false or misleading information created, presented and disseminated for the purpose of obtaining economic benefits or misleading public opinion, which may cause public harm". The main goal of disinformation is to introduce divisions through distortion and falsification of facts, leading to confusion and weakening trust in institutions and established political processes.¹⁴

False information is divided into two groups: the first is based on the intentions accompanying its dissemination (e.g. disinformation), the second—on the basis of the knowledge contained in the information (e.g. hoaxes).¹⁵ Contemporary media discourse often refers to disinformation as one of the most serious social threats, as it is a "deliberate attempt to disorient or manipulate people by providing them with dishonest information".¹⁶ Although disinformation is not a new phenomenon, with the development of media, journalism and public communication, its frequency has increased, especially in the context of political discourse, which plays a key role in shaping public opinion. As a

¹⁴ A. Jungherr, R. Schroeder, *Disinformation and the Structural Transformations of the Public Arena: Addressing the Actual Challenges to Democracy*, "Social Media + Society", 2021, vol. 7, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305121988928>, 1.

¹⁵ S. Kumar, N. Shah, *False Information on Web and Social Media: A Survey*, "arXiv Preprint", 2018, arXiv:1804.08559.

¹⁶ C. Ireton, J. Posetti, *Journalism, Fake News & Disinformation: Handbook for Journalism Education and Training*, UNESCO, Paryž 2018, 7.

result, the spread of disinformation can significantly affect the views and beliefs of society and even threaten the security and stability of the state.¹⁷ In political communication, which is based on the relationship between politics and the media, it is crucial that the messages are understandable and reach the recipient. Nevertheless, this type of communication is particularly susceptible to the spread of disinformation. This is due to the fact that politics is a specific area of social life in which the way it is perceived by society is of fundamental importance. After all, politics is primarily about people, which is why false or contradictory information that reaches them has a direct impact on the way politics is shaped in a given country.

George Lakoff, in his book *Moral Politics*, emphasizes that contemporary public debate, including political debate, cannot be completely neutral, because every message in this space is a carrier of beliefs and opinions.¹⁸ This is the result of the fact that even the most objective public discourse is always to some extent colored by specific ideas and values. Media that try to maintain neutrality and objectivity often unconsciously direct their materials towards one of the political options, which is particularly visible in the context of complex political debates. Attempts to eliminate this phenomenon prove difficult to implement, as has been proven by media events in recent years. Even media that try to avoid subjective assessments often present information in a way that – even subtly – steers the recipient towards one of the political points of view. This phenomenon, over which the media have limited influence, makes it extremely difficult to achieve full balance and neutrality in the public sphere. It is worth pointing out the numerous forms of fake news, which are primarily intended to undermine “the credibility of information that meets the

¹⁷ G. Belova, G. Georgieva, *Fake News as a Threat to National Security*, “International Conference Knowledge-Based Organization”, 2018, vol. 24, nr 1, 19–22, <https://doi.org/10.1515/kbo-2018-0003>, 17.

¹⁸ G. Lakoff, *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2002, 379.

threshold of verifiability and public interest—i.e. real news”.¹⁹ These include: news satire, news parody, news fabrication, photo manipulation, questionable advertising or propaganda.²⁰

However, it is necessary to distinguish between disinformation and misleading information. As mentioned earlier, disinformation is false information that is intended to deliberately mislead the recipient. Misleading information can also be misleading, but its intentions are different. Namely, misinformation is based on incomplete knowledge or false assumptions, and the person spreading it may repeat it based on fragmentary information that was given to them or that they inferred. For this reason, their actions cannot be considered intentional misleading, but rather unintentional disinformation.²¹ Disinformation is often associated with propaganda, because the two phenomena share common manipulative goals. The difference is that propaganda, like disinformation, aims to convince the public that there is only one correct perspective and that all others are wrong. However, unlike disinformation, it may contain elements that are true, although until they are often used in a selective or distorted way.²²

It is therefore worth noting that the distinction between disinformation, misinformation and propaganda is crucial in the analysis of contemporary communication problems, including disinformation. Attention to these differences can help us better understand how disinformation shapes contemporary public discourses.

¹⁹ Ireton, Posetti, *Journalism, Fake News & Disinformation...*, 7.

²⁰ E. C. Tandoc, Z. W. Lim, R. Ling, *Defining 'Fake News'*, “Digital Journalism”, 2017, vol. 6, nr 2, 137–153, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1360143>, 145.

²¹ S. Lewandowsky, W. G. K. Stritzke, A. M. Freund, K. Oberauer, J. I. Krueger, *Misinformation, Disinformation, and Violent Conflict: From Iraq and the 'War on Terror' to Future Threats*, “American Psychologist”, 2013, vol. 68, nr 7, 487.

²² A. Lanoszka, *Disinformation in International Politics*, “European Journal of International Security”, 2019, vol. 4, nr 1, 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.1017/eis.2019.6>, 2–3.

Framing as a Tool for Analyzing Media Messages

In today's society, the media not only play the role of the main source of information, but also shape our perception of reality. They often use the framing technique, which consists in giving a specific context to social, political or cultural topics. This technique allows the media not only to create interpretations of events, but also to strengthen existing power dynamics and give meaning to current events. The frames that form the basis of framing are often based on stereotypes and metaphors rooted in culture, which is why framing becomes both a cultural and social phenomenon. Contemporary public discourse shows how much this technique influences not only politics, but also the shaping of social attitudes, which are formulated on the basis of an analysis of the needs of society.²³

Framing, like any communication technique, has a specific goal already at the stage of creating the message. The media, through the selection of content and the way it is presented, suggest to the recipients a moral assessment of the presented phenomena, which shapes their opinions and reactions. Although the sender can predict the effects of their message, they are not able to completely control the reactions and interpretations of the recipients, who retain a certain autonomy in the process of understanding the transmitted information. This dynamic of influence means that recipients are able to react to the same content in different ways, which is an important aspect of the framing technique.²⁴ In the face of the growing problem of disinformation, researchers have begun to pay attention to the need to develop tools that will allow for the effective recognition, analysis

²³ S. R. Muir, L. D. Roberts, L. P. Sheridan, *The Portrayal of Online Shaming in Contemporary Online News Media: A Media Framing Analysis*, "Computers in Human Behavior Reports", 2021, vol. 3, 2.

²⁴ Bawazier, Nurhajati, *The Media Framing...*, 199.

and limitation of the spread of false information. These tools include both technical ones, such as linguistic analysis, the study of temporal patterns or sources of information, and non-technical ones, including media literacy, psychological awareness and the development of critical thinking.²⁵

One of the negative effects of framing is the reinforcement of stereotypes, which can have an adverse effect on the entire public discourse. This phenomenon depends to a large extent on the intentions of the sender and the way the message is constructed. As a result, the media, which influence public discourse, play a crucial role in shaping public opinion. While opinion formation is also influenced by individual values, many people depend on the media, particularly in situations where their knowledge is limited. In such cases, the media become the primary source of information, and the content they provide may not present the full picture of the situation, but only a selected fragment. Framing often uses metaphors that influence the way we perceive certain phenomena. An example is the description of illegal immigration to Europe, which uses expressions such as “wave” or “tsunami,” which bring to mind dangerous natural phenomena. Such metaphors are not neutral and usually aim to emphasize certain aspects while ignoring others.

According to George Lakoff, in order to fully understand how metaphors affect our worldview, it is necessary to analyze them critically.²⁶ Understanding the mechanisms of how metaphors work can help us to explore more deeply how they shape our understanding of social and political ideas. Often, our knowledge of the world is based solely on media messages, which means that the images and information presented there shape our ideas about people and events. Framing, or giving a specific context to specif-

²⁵ B. Stewart, S. Jackson, J. Ishiyama, M. C. Marshall, *Explaining Russian State-Sponsored Disinformation Campaigns: Who Is Targeted and Why?*, “East European Politics”, 2024, vol. 40, nr 3, 2.

²⁶ G. Lakoff, *The Political Mind: Why You Can't Understand 21st-Century Politics with an 18th-Century Brain*, Viking Books, New York 2008, 153.

ic issues, allows us to look at them from a different perspective than the traditional approach.²⁷ Thanks to this, framing becomes a tool for conceptualizing social phenomena, activating specific interpretations and views. In politics, framing plays a special role because it allows the problem to be presented in a changed light, which affects how society perceives situations and events. People are often unaware of how strongly their attitudes, thoughts and opinions are shaped by the media and framing. Politicians deliberately employ this tool to influence public sentiment and election outcomes. By skillfully utilizing framing, both the media and politicians can manipulate the perception of events, fostering associations that shape our attitudes toward the issues at hand.

Framing is a powerful tool in the hands of politicians and the media, which serves to formulate and shape public discourse. It is not limited to political issues, but also includes moral aspects, influencing the way society develops its thoughts, deepens its knowledge about the world and understands the mechanisms of its functioning. It is one of the key elements of political communication, performing both manipulative and educational. There are three main functions that frames perform: first, scoring, i.e. defining what a given problem is. Second, developing, including diagnosing and forecasting. Diagnosis in this context means assigning responsibility for previously identified issues, while forecasting refers to indicating possible solutions to diagnosed problems. The third function is motivating, i.e. providing guidelines that guide human action.²⁸

The phenomenon of framing is closely related to the problem of disinformation, which in the public sphere poses a serious threat to the quality of social debate. Disinformation, i.e. the deliberate dissemination of false or misleading information, often

²⁷ S. Prendeville, P. Syperek, L. Santamaria, *On the Politics of Design Framing Practices*, in: *Design and Political Agency*, 2024, 79.

²⁸ R. D. Benford, D. A. Snow, *Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment*, "Annual Review of Sociology", 2000, vol. 26, nr 1, 623.

uses the framing mechanism to manipulate public opinion. By appropriately framing facts, omitting important information or giving some elements excessive importance, the media can create a specific image of reality that is consistent with their intentions or interests. In this way, recipients are exposed to adopting one-sided interpretations of events, which leads to a false understanding of reality. Ultimately, framing combined with disinformation can have far-reaching consequences, influencing social attitudes, political decisions, and general perception of the world. In an era of digitalization and the rapid spread of information, media responsibility for the way they present content is crucial to maintaining a fair and transparent public debate. For this reason, it is extremely important to be aware of the impact that framing has on the process of creating and receiving information.

Examples of Russian Disinformation in the Media Using Framing

Currently, Russia is one of the most active countries in the field of dissemination of disinformation, with a clear goal – to destabilize agreements and cooperation between the Baltic states and the entire European Union. Therefore, it is believed that Russia is waging war not only with Ukraine in physical form, but also with the whole of Europe in informational and psychological form. By having media that can publish content on international servers, Russia is able to cause disinformation effects that have far-reaching consequences – even when no bombs are falling on the territory of European countries. Moreover, it is noted that the Russian authorities are able to impose their will or opinion on other countries without using physical violence, but mainly through social media and the Internet.²⁹

²⁹ R. Thornton, *The Russian Military's New 'Main Emphasis': Asymmetric Warfare*, "The RUSI Journal", 2017, vol. 162, nr 4, 18–28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2017.1381401>.

To examine how framing is employed in the Russian disinformation campaign, it is essential to focus on three key elements. First, Russia's goal is to increase political divisions, which is achieved by emphasizing narratives favoring one group (e.g. the Russian government) at the expense of other political groups (e.g. the authorities of the Baltic countries, NATO).³⁰ Second, framing is used to undermine the legitimacy of governments, most often by disseminating false and manipulated information that aims to weaken public support, e.g. among NATO allies. Third, framing can be used to create images of the enemy, in which NATO is presented as an aggressor, threatening the freedom and sovereignty of the Russian Federation. In such a case, Russia claims that all its actions are defensive in nature, and it is it that is harmed.³¹ Based on current disinformation campaigns, one can indicate the frames used by Russia.

One of the most common is the "defense against aggression" frame, in which Russia's actions, such as the annexation of Crimea or the attack on Ukraine, are presented as necessary, liberating, and motivated by concern for the welfare of the Russian-speaking population of these areas.³² Additionally, it is emphasized that any actions by Western countries are hostile, and Russia was forced to respond to them. In this way, Russia presents itself as an innocent victim whose behavior is not aggressive, but is merely an attempt to protect itself from the constant aggression and prejudice of the US and Western countries. To reinforce this message, the terms "Russophobia" and "xenophobia" often appear in the media, suggesting that any grievances

³⁰ Lanoszka, *Disinformation in International Politics*, 15–16.

³¹ B. Nimmo, D. Barojan, N. Aleksejeva, *Russian Narratives on NATO's Deployment*, "Digital Forensic Research Lab", 1 kwietnia 2017, <https://medium.com/dfirlab/russian-narratives-on-natos-deployment-616e19c3d194>.

³² NewsBalt, *Theme: Soft Occupation of the USA by Poland and the Baltic States*, "NewsBalt", 2018, dostęp: 20.11.2024, <http://newsbalt.ru/subject/soft-occupation-usa>.

against Russia are the result of racism and ethnic prejudices that have accumulated in the past.³³

Another frame that can be seen in Russia's disinformation activities is the shift towards the protection of culture and values. Russian politicians often state that their military actions are aimed at defending traditional Russian values and culture, which are threatened by "fraternizing" with the "corrupt" West. In this context, terms such as "collapse of civilization" or "departure from traditional values" are often used, referring in particular to issues related to the growing security and equality of LGBTQI+ people. In this way, Russia emphasizes that it is a place where traditional values, family roles, and gender norms are still present and constitute a counterbalance to the declining Western countries.³⁴

Another frame that can also be distinguished here is the frequent reference to ethnicity and history. This frame is most often presented in the Baltic countries and the countries of the former USSR. Such narratives are addressed to people of Russian origin, referring to a common history, language, and tradition, which allows for the creation of a certain sense of belonging to Russia.³⁵ In this case, the falsification of history and its retelling may also occur. An example of this is the rewriting of history regarding the USSR's involvement in World War II. In recent years, there have been many distorted versions of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, which were intended to mislead, but above all to minimize and trivialize the USSR's involvement in starting this conflict.³⁶

³³ U.S. Department of State, *Russia's Top Five Persistent Disinformation Narratives*, "State Department", 2022, dostęp: 20.11.2024, <https://www.state.gov/russias-top-five-persistent-disinformation-narratives>.

³⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Russia's Top Five Persistent Disinformation Narratives*, "State Department", 2022, dostęp: 20.11.2024, <https://www.state.gov/russias-top-five-persistent-disinformation-narratives>.

³⁵ Lanoszka, *Disinformation in International Politics*, 17–18.

³⁶ S. Radchenko, *Vladimir Putin Wants to Rewrite the History of World War II*, "Foreign Policy", 21 stycznia 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/01/21/vladimir-putin-wants-to-rewrite-the-history-of-world-war-ii>.

These frames are used by Russia as disinformation tools to manipulate the perception of reality, strengthen the sense of identity, and undermine historical truth, with the aim of both legitimizing current policies and influencing public opinion in post-Soviet countries. ■

Framing Effects and Public Perception: Analyzing the Rhetoric of Political Disinformation

SUMMARY

The article discusses the role of framing, rhetoric, and disinformation in contemporary communication, focusing on their impact on shaping public opinion and the dynamics of social debate. In the context of increasing media channels, disinformation has become a significant threat to the quality of public discourse. The mechanisms of framing, which provide specific contexts to events, are used to manipulate the perception of facts by audiences. The combination of framing with disinformational rhetoric allows the creation of false narratives that can destabilize societies and political processes. The article presents examples of Russian disinformation as an illustration of these mechanisms, drawing attention to techniques used by states and organizations to manipulate public opinion. The importance of information verification and the development of educational tools to combat disinformation and protect the quality of public debate is emphasized.

Keywords: framing, disinformation, rhetoric, media manipulation, disinformation techniques

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