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EXISTING APPROACHES TO PROPAGANDA ANALYSIS: A CRITICAL REVIEW AND THE NEED FOR AN INTEGRATIVE ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

ІСНУЮЧІ ПІДХОДИ ДО АНАЛІЗУ ПРОПАГАНДИ: КРИТИЧНИЙ ОГЛЯД ТА ПЕРЕДУМОВИ РОЗРОБЛЕННЯ ІНТЕГРАТИВНОЇ АНАЛІТИЧНОЇ МОДЕЛІ

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This article critically examines the principal theoretical and methodological approaches to propaganda analysis in order to evaluate their capacity to investigate implicit propaganda in contemporary political media discourse. Although propaganda research has evolved from classical models of persuasion to approaches grounded in discourse analysis, cognition, framing, pragmatics, and multimodality, existing analytical traditions remain methodologically fragmented. The study reviews the contributions and limitations of classical propaganda studies, semiotics, Critical Linguistics, Critical Discourse Analysis, the socio-cognitive approach, framing theory, pragmatics, narrative analysis, and multimodal discourse analysis, with particular attention to their ability to identify implicit forms of propaganda. The comparative analysis demonstrates that these approaches address different analytical levels, including lexico-grammatical, discursive, cognitive, pragmatic, narrative, framing, and multimodal dimensions, and should therefore be regarded as complementary and their isolated application cannot adequately explain the multidimensional interaction of linguistic, discursive, cognitive, and semiotic mechanisms underlying implicit propaganda. The article argues that the principal limitation of contemporary propaganda research lies in methodological fragmentation rather than in the explanatory value of individual approaches. It substantiates the need for an integrative analytical perspective that combines complementary analytical levels into a coherent methodology for investigating implicit propaganda.

Key words: implicit propaganda, propaganda analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis, socio-cognitive approach, framing theory, multimodal discourse analysis, integrative analytical framework.

У статті здійснено критичний аналіз основних теоретичних і методологічних підходів до дослідження пропаганди з метою оцінки їхньої здатності виявляти імпліцитну пропаганду в сучасному політичному медіадискурсі. Незважаючи на еволюцію досліджень пропаганди від класичних моделей переконання до підходів, що ґрунтуються на дискурс-аналізі, когнітивній теорії, теорії фреймів, прагматиці та мультимодальному аналізі, сучасні аналітичні традиції залишаються методологічно фрагментованими. У роботі розглянуто внесок і обмеження класичних досліджень пропаганди, семіотики, критичної лінгвістики, критичного дискурс-аналізу, соціокогнітивного підходу, теорії фреймів, прагматики, наративного аналізу та мультимодального дискурс-аналізу, з особливою увагою до їхньої здатності виявляти імпліцитні форми пропаганди. Порівняльний аналіз засвідчив, що зазначені підходи досліджують різні аналітичні рівні, зокрема лексико-граматичний, дискурсивний, когнітивний, прагматичний, наративний, фреймовий і мультимодальний, тому їх доцільно розглядати як взаємодоповнювальні. Водночас їх ізольоване застосування не дає змоги адекватно пояснити багатовимірну взаємодію мовних, дискурсивних, когнітивних та семіотичних механізмів, що лежать в основі імпліцитної пропаганди. Обґрунтовано, що головним обмеженням сучасних досліджень пропаганди є не недостатня пояснювальна здатність окремих підходів, а їхня методологічна фрагментова-

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ність. На цій основі доведено необхідність інтегративної аналітичної перспективи, яка поєднує взаємодоповнювальні аналітичні рівні в цілісну методологію дослідження імпліцитної пропаганди.

Ключові слова: імпліцитна пропаганда, аналіз пропаганди, критичний дискурс-аналіз, соціокогнітивний підхід, теорія фреймів, мультимодальний дискурс-аналіз, інтегративна аналітична модель.

Problem statement. Propaganda is widely recognised as a form of political communication that influences public opinion, supports political objectives, and contributes to the construction of social reality [1; 2, pp. 1790–1792]. While traditionally associated with wartime communication, authoritarian regimes, and explicit ideological persuasion, contemporary propaganda increasingly operates through indirect and implicit communicative strategies. In the digital information environment, persuasive influence is achieved through framing, identity affirmation, and the construction of discursive meaning rather than through overt ideological appeals [3, pp. 2–5; 4, pp. 2–4]. Instead of explicitly directing audiences on what to think, contemporary propaganda guides interpretation by activating culturally shared assumptions, framing events, and shaping inferential processes, often presenting ideological meanings as natural or objective representations of reality [5, pp. 52–54; 6, pp. 362–367; 7, pp. 117–142].

These developments have been reinforced by digital media ecosystems characterised by multimodal communication, algorithmically personalised information flows, and the rapid circulation of political narratives across multiple platforms [8; 9]. Contemporary political communication increasingly combines textual, visual, and audiovisual resources, making propaganda a multidimensional communicative phenomenon in which persuasive meanings emerge through the interaction of linguistic, discursive, cognitive, narrative, pragmatic, and multimodal mechanisms [10; 11].

The increasing complexity of implicit propaganda poses significant methodological challenges for researchers. Existing analytical approaches, including Critical Discourse Analysis [12; 13], framing theory [5], socio-cognitive approaches [14], pragmatics [7], and multimodal discourse analysis [10], provide valuable insights into particular dimensions of propagandistic communication. However, none independently captures its multidimensional nature, resulting in a fragmented understanding of how linguistic, discursive, cognitive, pragmatic, narrative, and multimodal resources interact in the construction of implicit ideological meaning.

Therefore, *the significance of this research* lies in addressing the methodological fragmentation of contemporary propaganda studies by developing a comprehensive perspective that integrates complementary analytical approaches to investigate implicit propaganda as a multidimensional phenomenon. *The scientific novelty of the study* lies in its critical synthesis of existing approaches, including propaganda studies, semiotics, Critical Discourse Analysis, socio-cognitive theory, framing theory, pragmatics, narrative analysis, and multimodal discourse analysis, within a unified analytical perspective. This synthesis identifies their complementary contributions and methodological limitations, establishing the conceptual foundations for an integrative framework for analysing implicit propaganda.

Consequently, **the purpose of the study** is to critically examine the principal theoretical and methodological approaches to propaganda analysis in order to evaluate their capacity to investigate implicit propaganda, identify their conceptual strengths and methodological limitations, and establish the conceptual foundations for an integrative analytical framework designed to analyse implicit propaganda as a multidimensional communicative phenomenon

To establish the theoretical foundations for such an integrative perspective, it is first necessary to examine how propaganda research has evolved and to evaluate the contributions and limitations of the principal analytical traditions. Accordingly, the following section critically reviews the major theoretical and methodological approaches to propaganda analysis.

Analysis of the recent research and publications. The study of propaganda has undergone substantial theoretical evolution over the past century, reflecting broader developments in communication theory, linguistics, cognitive science, and media studies. While early research primarily conceptualised

propaganda as a direct instrument of persuasion [15; 16], contemporary scholarship increasingly recognises it as a multidimensional communicative phenomenon operating simultaneously through language, discourse, cognition, framing, and multimodal representation [12; 5; 14; 10]. This evolution demonstrates a gradual shift from message-centred explanations toward increasingly sophisticated models capable of accounting for the complexity of ideological influence in modern political communication.

The foundations of modern propaganda research are commonly associated with the work of Harold D. Lasswell, who conceptualised propaganda as a strategic process of influencing public opinion through the deliberate production and dissemination of political messages [15]. His classical communication model, «Who says what, in which channel, to whom, and with what effect?», provided one of the first systematic frameworks for analysing political communication by emphasising the relationships among the communicator, the message, the audience, and persuasive effects [17, pp. 37–38]. Within this perspective, propaganda was primarily understood as a purposeful process of message transmission designed to influence attitudes and behaviour [15, pp. 627–629; 18, pp. 2–10].

Lasswell's model established an important theoretical foundation for propaganda studies by explaining propaganda as a planned communicative activity with identifiable participants and intended effects [15; 18]. However, its explanatory power is largely confined to the transmission of messages and their persuasive outcomes. The model provides limited insight into how ideological meanings are linguistically and discursively constructed, how audiences infer implicit meanings, or how propaganda operates when persuasive intentions are concealed rather than explicitly expressed. These dimensions have been further explored by later approaches, including Critical Discourse Analysis [12; 13], socio-cognitive theory [14], pragmatics [7], and multimodal discourse analysis [10]. Consequently, while Lasswell's approach remains fundamental for understanding propaganda as strategic communication, it provides limited methodological guidance for analysing the implicit and multidimensional forms of propaganda characteristic of contemporary political discourse.

The emergence of semiotics in the second half of the twentieth century marked an important shift in propaganda research from the study of message transmission to the analysis of meaning construction. Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco viewed propaganda not simply as persuasive communication but as a system of signs through which ideology is represented and normalised in culture [19; 20]. They argued that ideological meanings are embedded in signs, symbols, myths, and cultural narratives that audiences often perceive as natural or self-evident. Barthes explained how myths transform historically contingent ideological meanings into common sense [19], while Eco showed that meaning is produced through culturally shared interpretative codes rather than residing in signs themselves [20].

The semiotic tradition broadened the study of propaganda by demonstrating that ideological influence often operates through symbolic representation rather than explicit political argumentation [19; 20]. This perspective helped explain how propaganda conceals its persuasive intent by presenting ideological interpretations as objective or self-evident [19]. However, semiotics focuses primarily on the representation of meaning rather than on the linguistic, discursive, and pragmatic mechanisms through which ideological meanings are constructed in political communication. It also provides limited methodological tools for analysing grammatical organisation, discourse structure, framing, pragmatic inference, or the interaction of verbal and visual resources. These aspects have been more fully developed in Critical Discourse Analysis [12; 13], framing theory [5], pragmatics [7], and multimodal discourse analysis [10]. Consequently, although semiotics established the conceptual foundations for understanding the implicit nature of ideological communication, it does not provide a comprehensive methodology for analysing implicit propaganda in contemporary political discourse.

These limitations encouraged subsequent approaches to investigate the linguistic organisation of ideological communication more systematically, giving rise to Critical Linguistics and later Critical Discourse Analysis.

The growing interest in language as a mechanism of ideological influence led to the emergence of Critical Linguistics during the 1970s. Scholars such as Roger Fowler, Gunther Kress, Bob Hodge,

and Tony Trew argued that linguistic structures are not ideologically neutral but systematically reflect social relations of power and inequality. This perspective shifted attention from the content of political messages to the linguistic choices through which political reality is represented. Lexical selection, transitivity, nominalisation, passivisation, modality, and syntactic organisation were viewed as linguistic resources that encode ideological perspectives rather than as neutral grammatical forms [21].

Critical Linguistics made an important contribution to propaganda research by introducing systematic linguistic analysis as a means of identifying ideological representation in political texts. It demonstrated that propaganda may operate not only through explicit political claims but also through routine lexical and grammatical choices that shape the representation of social actors and events [21]. However, its analytical focus remained largely text-centred, paying comparatively little attention to the broader social context in which discourse is produced and interpreted. These limitations stimulated the development of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

Developed primarily through the work of Norman Fairclough, CDA expanded the scope of ideological analysis by conceptualising discourse as a form of social practice [12]. Fairclough's three-dimensional model integrates textual analysis with discursive practices and broader socio-cultural contexts, enabling researchers to examine how ideological meanings are produced, circulated, and legitimised within institutional and political communication [12]. Rather than treating texts as isolated linguistic artefacts, CDA explains how language interacts with power, ideology, and social structures in the reproduction of social inequality. This perspective significantly strengthened propaganda research by linking micro-level linguistic choices with macro-level ideological processes.

CDA also provides a more comprehensive account of ideological discourse than earlier linguistic approaches by demonstrating how language contributes to the production and maintenance of institutional power [12; 13]. Nevertheless, its primary analytical emphasis remains on interpreting ideology and power relations rather than on systematically identifying propagandistic communication. Although CDA offers sophisticated tools for discourse analysis, it does not provide an operationalised taxonomy of implicit propaganda markers or explain how linguistic, cognitive, pragmatic, framing, narrative, and multimodal mechanisms interact in the construction of propagandistic meaning. Consequently, while CDA remains one of the most influential approaches to ideological discourse analysis, it explains only part of the multidimensional processes underlying implicit propaganda. These limitations encouraged the development of socio-cognitive approaches, which incorporated audience cognition into the analysis of political discourse [14].

The socio-cognitive approach, developed by Teun A. van Dijk, extended discourse analysis by integrating discourse, cognition, and society within a unified explanatory framework. According to this perspective, political discourse both reflects and shapes socially shared mental models, ideological beliefs, and collective knowledge structures that influence how audiences interpret political events [14]. Concepts such as context models, the ideological square, and ideological polarisation demonstrate that persuasion operates not only through linguistic representation but also through cognitive processes that guide interpretation and information processing [14].

By incorporating cognition into discourse analysis, the socio-cognitive approach significantly expanded propaganda research beyond textual analysis, providing a more comprehensive explanation of how ideological meanings are interpreted and internalised by audiences. However, its primary analytical emphasis remains on cognitive representations rather than on the linguistic and discursive mechanisms through which these representations are constructed. Although the model explains how ideology is cognitively processed, it provides comparatively limited methodological guidance for identifying the lexical, grammatical, pragmatic, narrative, framing, and multimodal resources through which implicit propaganda is realised in political discourse. Consequently, the socio-cognitive approach constitutes an essential explanatory dimension but does not, on its own, provide a comprehensive analytical methodology for investigating implicit propagandistic communication.

The growing complexity of political communication subsequently directed scholarly attention to the ways in which information is selectively organised to shape public interpretation. Framing the-

ory, developed by Robert Entman and further elaborated by Dietram A. Scheufele, shifted analytical attention from discourse production to the representation of political reality [5; 22]. Rather than focusing primarily on ideology or cognition, framing theory explains how communicators influence interpretation by selecting particular aspects of reality, assigning salience to specific issues, and promoting preferred problem definitions, causal interpretations, moral evaluations, and policy recommendations [5]. In this way, framing theory demonstrated that propagandistic influence frequently operates through the strategic selection and organisation of information rather than through explicit ideological statements.

Framing theory has made an important contribution to propaganda research by explaining how preferred interpretations are constructed without necessarily altering factual information [5; 22]. Nevertheless, its principal unit of analysis is the frame itself rather than the linguistic, cognitive, or pragmatic mechanisms through which frames are realised in discourse. As a result, framing analysis provides limited methodological guidance for examining how lexical, grammatical, inferential, narrative, and multimodal resources interact in the construction of implicit propagandistic meaning. These limitations have encouraged increasing attention to pragmatic approaches, which investigate how implicit meanings are communicated through inference rather than explicit linguistic expression [7].

The rapid expansion of digital media and visual communication has further transformed propaganda research by highlighting the multimodal nature of contemporary political discourse. Social semiotics and multimodal discourse analysis, particularly the work of Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, demonstrated that ideological meanings are constructed through the interaction of verbal language, visual images, colour, typography, spatial organisation, and other semiotic resources [10]. This perspective considerably broadened propaganda studies by showing that persuasive meaning rarely emerges from language alone but is produced through the coordinated use of multiple semiotic modes [10; 11].

However, multimodal approaches primarily focus on the interpretation of visual and other semiotic resources rather than on the integration of linguistic, discursive, cognitive, pragmatic, and narrative dimensions of political communication. Consequently, although multimodal discourse analysis has become essential for understanding contemporary propaganda, it provides only a partial account of the multidimensional mechanisms through which implicit propagandistic meaning is constructed.

Presentation of the Main Material. The first finding of the critical review is that, although each analytical tradition offers valuable insights into specific dimensions of propagandistic communication, no single approach is sufficient to account for the complex, interconnected mechanisms by which implicit propaganda operates (see Table 1). Contemporary political discourse rarely relies on only one communicative resource. Instead, ideological meanings emerge through the interaction of linguistic choices, discourse organisation, framing strategies, narrative structures, pragmatic inference, cognitive processing, and multimodal representation. Because these mechanisms operate simultaneously, analysing only one analytical level inevitably provides a partial explanation of propagandistic communication.

Another principal finding of the review is that existing approaches to propaganda analysis differ not only in their theoretical assumptions but also in the analytical level at which they investigate propagandistic communication. Rather than representing competing explanations of the same phenomenon, these approaches illuminate different layers of ideological meaning construction. Their apparent methodological fragmentation therefore reflects differences in analytical focus rather than theoretical incompatibility.

Taken together, the reviewed approaches reveal that implicit propaganda operates simultaneously across several interconnected levels of communication (see Table 2). Critical Linguistics primarily investigates the **lexico-grammatical level**, demonstrating how lexical selection, syntactic organisation, transitivity, modality, and other grammatical choices encode ideological perspectives. Critical Discourse Analysis extends the analysis to the **discursive level**, examining how ideological mean-

Table 1

Theoretical Approaches to Implicit Propaganda Analysis: Contributions and Methodological Limitations

Main theoretical approach	Contribution to the analysis of implicit propaganda	Main methodological limitation
Critical Linguistics	Identifies linguistic encoding of ideology in textual structures	Limited consideration of discourse context and interpretation
Critical Discourse Analysis	Explains how ideological meanings are produced and reproduced within social practices	Does not provide a systematic taxonomy of implicit propaganda mechanisms
Narrative Analysis	Reveals how ideology is organised through recurring narrative patterns	Limited attention to linguistic realisation and cognitive processing
Framing Theory	Explains how preferred interpretations are constructed through selective representation	Does not explain the linguistic and pragmatic mechanisms through which frames are realised
Pragmatics (Relevance Theory, Speech Act Theory)	Reveals implicit meanings and persuasive effects beyond explicit statements	Limited consideration of ideology, discourse organisation, and multimodal communication
Socio-cognitive Approach	Explains how audiences process and internalise ideological meanings	Limited analysis of the linguistic realisation of cognitive processes
Multimodal Discourse Analysis	Explains how persuasive meanings emerge from multiple semiotic modes	Limited integration with cognitive, pragmatic and discourse-oriented analysis

Table 2

Analytical Levels Required for the Investigation of Implicit Propaganda as a Multidimensional Communicative Phenomenon

Dimension of implicit propaganda	Analytical level	What is analysed	Representative analytical approach(es)
Linguistic representation	Lexico-grammatical	Lexical choices, transitivity, modality, nominalisation, syntactic structures	Critical Linguistics
Discursive construction	Discursive	Ideology, legitimation, argumentation, discourse organisation	Critical Discourse Analysis
Narrative organisation	Narrative	Storylines, actors, conflicts, value structures	Narrative Analysis
Interpretative organisation	Framing	Frames, salience, problem definition, causal interpretation, evaluation	Framing Theory
Implicit meaning	Pragmatic (Inferential)	Presupposition, implicature, inference, indirect meaning	Pragmatics (Relevance Theory, Speech Act Theory)
Cognitive processing	Cognitive	Mental models, shared knowledge, ideological beliefs	Socio-cognitive Approach
Semiotic integration	Multimodal	Interaction of verbal, visual and other semiotic resources	Multimodal Discourse Analysis

ings are produced, legitimised, and reproduced within broader social and institutional contexts. The socio-cognitive approach shifts attention to the **cognitive level**, explaining how discourse activates mental models, shared knowledge, and ideological beliefs that guide interpretation. Framing theory addresses the **interpretative level** by demonstrating how communicators selectively organise political reality to promote preferred understandings of events.

Other approaches examine additional dimensions of implicit propaganda. Pragmatic theories investigate the **inferential level**, revealing how presuppositions, implicatures, and other forms of implicit meaning influence interpretation without explicit ideological statements. Narrative approaches focus on the **narrative level**, explaining how recurrent story structures organise political actors, events, and values into coherent ideological accounts. Finally, multimodal discourse analysis investigates

the **multimodal level**, demonstrating how verbal language interacts with images, colour, typography, spatial organisation, and other semiotic resources in constructing persuasive political meanings.

Consequently, the principal limitation of existing approaches lies not in their individual explanatory power but in their methodological isolation. The review, therefore, suggests that implicit propaganda cannot be adequately explained within a single analytical tradition, as it is a multidimensional communicative phenomenon. Rather, it emerges through the interaction of linguistic, discursive, cognitive, pragmatic, narrative, framing, and multimodal mechanisms. Consequently, its investigation requires an analytical perspective that incorporates multiple complementary levels of analysis.

Conclusions. This critical review has examined the principal theoretical and methodological approaches to propaganda analysis, including classical propaganda studies, semiotics, Critical Linguistics, Critical Discourse Analysis, socio-cognitive theory, framing theory, pragmatics, narrative analysis, and multimodal discourse analysis. The review demonstrates that each approach has significantly contributed to understanding particular dimensions of propagandistic communication, ranging from linguistic representation and ideological discourse to cognitive processing, interpretative framing, implicit meaning, and multimodal persuasion.

At the same time, the comparative analysis indicates that these approaches operate at different analytical levels and therefore explain different mechanisms involved in the construction of propagandistic meaning. Critical Linguistics primarily addresses the lexico-grammatical level; Critical Discourse Analysis focuses on discursive organisation; framing theory explains interpretative structures; socio-cognitive approaches investigate cognitive processing; pragmatic approaches analyse inferential meaning; narrative analysis examines ideological storylines; and multimodal approaches explore the interaction of verbal and visual resources. While each perspective provides valuable analytical tools, none independently accounts for the complex interaction of these communicative mechanisms that characterise implicit propaganda.

The review, therefore, suggests that the principal limitation of contemporary propaganda research lies not in the explanatory value of individual approaches but in their methodological fragmentation. Since implicit propaganda emerges through the cumulative interaction of linguistic, discursive, cognitive, pragmatic, narrative, framing, and multimodal resources, its investigation requires a multidimensional analytical perspective capable of integrating these complementary levels of analysis.

These findings provide the theoretical foundation for further research aimed at developing an integrative analytical framework to investigate implicit propaganda in political media discourse. Future research should focus on operationalising the complementary strengths of existing approaches into a coherent methodology that enables the systematic identification and analysis of implicit propagandistic mechanisms across multiple analytical levels. Such a framework may contribute to more comprehensive qualitative analyses of political communication and provide a methodological basis for subsequent corpus-based and computational studies of implicit propaganda.

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