Propaganda Content and Strategies of Nazi Germany from the Perspective of Emotional Communication

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Abstract: This paper, based on the theory of emotional communication, examines how Nazi Germany utilized and controlled public emotions in their propaganda content and strategies. Emotions play a crucial role in shaping audience attitudes and behaviors in the field of journalism and communication. Emotionally charged content can capture audience attention and resonance, and more importantly, emotions can induce specific behaviors during the process of communication. In terms of propaganda content, Nazi Germany extensively employed emotional rhetoric in their internal and external propaganda materials, frequently utilizing emotive language to incite the public, manipulate their value orientation, and cater to their emotional demands. They tightly linked the people's desire for national resurgence with an anti-Semitic ideology. In terms of propaganda strategies, Nazi Germany facilitated the spread of emotions through the "repetition-memory" effect, creating specific symbols and establishing an emotional space by constructing a simulated environment. Simultaneously, the Nazi regime attempted to mobilize emotions and induce people to participate in specific actions to enhance the efficacy of emotional communication. From the perspective of emotional communication efficacy, this propaganda approach undoubtedly garnered support and consolidated the power of the Third Reich to a certain extent. However, on the other hand, excessive stimulation and exploitation of public emotions also triggered a backlash and accelerated the downfall of the empire. The propaganda strategies of Nazi Germany serve as a reminder to contemporary media practitioners to make good use of emotional communication and strike a balance between emotional manipulation and truthful reporting. It also advises the general public to maintain calmness and objectivity when consuming news reports, so as not to be swayed by excessive emotional values.

Keywords: Emotional communication; Nazi Germany; propaganda research.

1. INTRODUCTION

"Emotion," as an inherent element in the process of news communication, has a significant impact on information production and circulation. As Peters (2011) argues, "hard, self-proclaimed objective news, which reports only facts, is not devoid of emotion, just as so-called tabloid news is not devoid of rationality" [1]. The concept of "emotional contagion" in psychology suggests that the transmission of cognitive concepts through emotional language stimulates individuals' emotions and to some extent influences their emotional choices. In the 1990s, scholars proposed the "Emotional Broadcaster Theory," which discussed the phenomenon of emotions spreading through interpersonal networks from the perspective of social sharing [2]. In the field of journalism and communication, emotional contagion refers to the transmission of news with a certain emotion as a carrier. Specifically, it refers to the subtle influence of news on the emotions and emotional inclinations of the public through the selection of specific content and appropriate presentation styles. Emotional contagion is a complex process influenced by various factors, including the emotional processing of journalists, the value orientation of the news content, and the use of persuasive language and audiovisual resources. Consequently, emotional contagion actively participates in the construction of cognition, the transformation of expression, the influence of social behavior, and the shaping of social culture. Through the transmission of emotions, news reports can affect people's attitudes, behaviors, and decision-making, thereby influencing the political, economic, and cultural activities of society. During the Nazi German period, the transmission of emotions did not form a systematic theory, but the Nazi government led by Hitler played the role of emotions in news dissemination to the fullest. Based on the comprehensive theories of emotional communication currently available, a retrospective analysis of Nazi Germany's propaganda content and methods of emotional transmission mechanisms and effects can assist media practitioners in enhancing the effectiveness of communication through better utilization of emotions. It serves as a reminder to media professionals to use Nazi Germany as a reference, to cautiously choose the use of emotional rhetoric and emotionalized language while maintaining sensitivity to the audience's emotions. Attention should be given to the ethical principles and moral issues of emotional communication, avoiding excessive exaggeration and incitement of emotions, focusing on conveying truthful and objective information, and finding a balance between utilizing emotions and reporting truthfully. Correspondingly, the audience should understand the mechanisms and
impacts of emotional communication, identify and interpret emotional manipulation in propaganda when confronted with news reports and propaganda, and always maintain a calm and objective stance, not to be swayed by excessive emotional values.

2. ELICITING PUBLIC EMOTIONS THROUGH PROPAGANDA CONTENT

In news reporting, emotional rhetoric is often used as a narrative strategy for emotional appeal. Propagandists make use of emotion-laden words, specific audiovisual language or other emotional rhetorical devices to make their messages more attractive, increase audience engagement, enhance communication effectiveness, and thereby influence public opinion.

2.1 Utilizing Emotional Rhetoric to Guide Emotions

From the very beginning, the Weimar Republic was caught between left-wing forces represented by the Communist Party, and right-wing forces under the banner of "nationalism" and "revanchism," the former accusing it of being a "traitor to the revolution" and the latter attacking it as a "national sinner." This affects the fate of the government and determines the future of the republic, whether it develops towards democracy or dictatorship. It was in this context that the Nazi Party inspired popular hatred after the war by advocating Germany's past glory, and skillfully linked its political demands with the people's demands for national restoration, in which Nazi Germany's propaganda work was indispensable. It is true that Nazi Germany was the product of propaganda, the first country to establish an international propaganda organization with a profound global impact[3]. In terms of the composition of propaganda content, Nazi Germany was committed to arousing specific emotions of the population, using a large number of emotional rhetoric and emotional language in propaganda texts for emotional motivation. As Goebbels said, "Our propaganda is aimed at ordinary people, so the arguments of propaganda must be rough, clear and powerful.[4]" The Nazi government firmly believed that the level of propaganda material must be appropriate to the target of propaganda. In Mein Kampf, Hitler explicitly declared that if you want to tell it, you must tell a big lie, because the big lie often has some kind of credible power and is easier to confuse the people. Therefore, the propaganda apparatus of the Nazi government did not pay attention to the authenticity of propaganda, but used simple language and strong words, such as "crush", "strength", "ruthless", "abomination", "storm", "awakening", "faith", "sacrifice", etc., to achieve its emotional incitement. Emotional rhetoric that is highly incendiary and spreads content that is easily acceptable to people in order to cater to the public's demand for information. In Hitler's view, "the masses have only a half-understanding of abstract ideas, so their reactions are more expressed in the field of feelings, and their positive and negative attitudes are rooted in this field."

2.2 Promoting National Revival Goals, Stimulating Public Emotion

At the same time, the Third Reich "perfectly blended the art of cinema with the glorious achievements of the empire, leading everyone into a beautiful political fantasy[5]." Since "war in the myth of national socialism represents the sublimation of all virtues ... It is a real testing ground for humanity and nations, [6]" Nazi Germany's propaganda films mostly look for themes from historical war events. These films often guide the population to humiliation and revenge as much as possible through simplified causal connections, adding legitimacy to later Nazi military operations. At the same time, these films are full of praise for authoritarian states and iron-blooded leaders, depictions of militarized life, and praises of Prussian virtues such as discipline, order, responsibility, and obedience, which arouse a sense of national pride in the history of the war. Nazi war films focus on the history of the Seven Years' War (1756-1763) and the "Liberation War" (1812-1814) under Frederick II the Great, which are the glorious war histories of the German nation. Through the propaganda of such films, Nazi Germany emphasized under the cloak of art the importance of establishing a political system based on absolute power, internal solidarity against foreign aggression, and society's acceptance of patriarchy as a model for the family and the state[7]. In this way, it not only exaggerates Germany's glorious past and dream of rejuvenation, but also caters to the people's demand for restoration, but also arouses people's pride and loyalty, arouses people's patriotic feelings, and stimulates the common feelings and collective identity of the German people. And these contents are exactly what the people want to see the most, and the "information cocoon" tailored for the people has increased the public's recognition of the Nazi government. At the same time, the Nazi government quietly increased the "stickiness" of Nazi propaganda by constantly giving the people emotional value, promoting people to gradually believe in the Nazi party and Hitler himself, and providing widespread support for their policies and actions.

2.3 Creating a Common Enemy to Incite Hatred Emotions
The Nazi Party effectively utilized propaganda to appeal to the material interests of many Germans, while advocating radical nationalism. "It is crucial to employ new and more nuanced methods to mold thousands, even millions of people, into a collective body with shared hatred, will, and aspirations. The divergences in opinions must be eradicated with new flames, and a fervor for battle as firm as steel must be forged. This new form of anvil for unifying society is called propaganda.[8]" German historian Ernst Nolte considers that the primary function of Nazi racism is to serve as a defensive tool for the ruling class that is threatened or losing power[9]. In the Nazi's perspective, an inherent anti-Semitic sentiment played a significant role as a criterion in defining psychological boundaries between their own race and others[7]. This "inherent sentiment" was transformed by Goebbels into a psychological defense mechanism, rather than an offensive one, specifically the so-called "international Jewish conspiracy". It provided the Nazis with an escape route from genuine social and political problems. Thus, in Nazi Germany, Jews were scapegoated for Germany's economic disaster and societal issues. The Nazi regime manipulated the public's xenophobic sentiments, inciting hatred towards Jews, dissenters, and other specific groups, declaring them as enemies of Germany, and frequently igniting public anger, fear, and hostility. This emotionally charged propaganda resonated with the public, cleverly blurring patriotism with racism, misleading the public's values. As a result, the public's demand for national restoration was tightly linked with the Nazi's anti-Semitic consciousness, strengthening public support for the Nazi regime.

3. CREATING MIMETIC ENVIRONMENTS TO FACILITATE EMOTIONAL DIFFUSION

3.1 Controlling Media and Unifying Discourse to Facilitate Emotional Spread

By leveraging exaggerated emotional rhetoric to evoke the public's pride in the past glory of the German nation, and coupling societal issues with Anti-Semitic sentiment, Nazi Germany masterfully stirred up public emotion during its propaganda campaigns. To sustain and solidify these emotions, the Nazi regime meticulously crafted policies to facilitate the spread of these sentiments. As Goebbels noted in his diary in May 1942, "News is a weapon of war. The aim of news is to assist the war, not to provide information"[10] . Hence, the Nazi government's propaganda theory was fundamentally rooted in the notion that "news is inherently political". At that time, the primary medium for news dissemination was the newspaper. Therefore, the Nazi regime imposed strict regulations on the publication and content of newspapers: they were considered a part of national affairs and should be strictly controlled by the government; they should absolutely obey government commands, and those disloyal to Nazism were not allowed to engage in journalism; newspaper discourse should be uniform, and journalists should not be misled by the fallacy of press freedom; newspapers were an essential tool for mass political education and ideological propaganda, and should strive to provide content that maintains the health of the nation[11]. To ensure that all print media echoed the government's voice, Goebbels, prior to assuming his position as Minister of Propaganda, once addressed newspaper representatives, stating, "The government believes that newspapers must assist the government; to achieve this goal, newspaper criticism is sometimes necessary, but such criticism must never allow other countries to distrust the German government. Therefore, the government expects the newspaper industry to perform its functions under the leadership of the National Propaganda Department"[12].

Table 1: Number and Circulation of Nazi Party Newspapers and Non-Party Newspapers[13]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Nazi Party Newspapers</th>
<th>Circulation of Nazi Party Newspapers</th>
<th>Number of Non-Party Newspapers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>3,197,964</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>3,375,757</td>
<td>3,097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>3,900,080</td>
<td>2,527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>4,328,140</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>4,556,755</td>
<td>2,208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938 (including Austria region)</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>4,726,266</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939 (including Sudetenland region)</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>6,120,057</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the above historical records, it is not difficult to see that since 1933, the number of daily newspapers of the
Nazi Party has steadily increased year by year, and at the same time, the number of daily newspapers issued has also increased. Moreover, due to the Nazi government's strict control of non-partisan newspapers and periodicals, and even the persecution of editors-in-chief of publications who disagreed with the Nazi government, the news dissemination throughout Germany was completely under the control of the government, which greatly facilitated Hitler's use and misdirection of people's feelings. The content of the newspapers and periodicals varied, but the ideas in them were unified, so that the people gradually lost judgment under the wave of "unanimous" voices, and even unconsciously contributed to the spread of the Nazi government's emotions, and Nazi Germany gradually formed a "emotional community" under such a propaganda policy.

### 3.2 Utilizing the Repetition-Memory Effect to Solidify Public Emotions

Since the masses' "ability to accept is very limited and their understanding is inferior," the content of propaganda can only be positive and negative, black or white, love or hate, right or wrong, true or false, and must not be half against half. In addition, because of the "forgetfulness of the masses", only constant repetition can engrave an idea in their hearts. In terms of propaganda methods, Nazi Germany used the "repetition-memory" effect in propaganda methods to spread emotions. Nazi Germany skillfully used symbols and symbols to transmit its ideology. For example, the symbol of the Nazi Party, the Nazi Party emblem, as well as Hitler's speeches and postures, are widely used in propaganda posters, films and other media, not only that, the Nazi Party in propaganda activities a large number of flags, party emblems, uniforms, medals, parades and other symbolic objects and forms, these symbols and collective activities form a mimetic environment. Nazi Germany exercised emotional control over its population through the repeated and continuous propagation of its ideology and slogans, consolidating people's identification with and acceptance of its ideas.

In summary, Nazi Germany effectively created a specific "emotional climate" for the population by tightly controlling the news media and employing repetitive indoctrination. Whether through newspapers, radio broadcasts, or films, the Nazi Party emphasized their core beliefs repeatedly, ensuring a continuous dissemination of information that permeated various aspects of ordinary people's lives. This deepened the impression of Nazi ideology among the general public, keeping them immersed in an emotional space dominated by the Nazi government and subsequently spreading these emotions to a wider social group.

### 4. SHAPING NAZI IDEOLOGY AND MOBILIZING EMOTIONS

Nazi Germany employed emotions to mobilize individuals and induce them to participate in specific actions. They utilized advanced technology and production techniques to disseminate their ideology and policies in a vivid, emotive, and persuasive manner that resonated with the audience. This included encouraging people to engage in collective activities and rallies of the Nazi Party, as well as join Nazi organizations and groups. Under the sway of manipulated emotions, individuals unconsciously accepted Nazi ideology and followed the guidance of the Nazi Party.

#### 4.1 Using Visual Brainwashing to Garner Public Support for Government Wars

Cinema, as a product of industrial development, also became a tool for political propaganda. By 1942, as the war situation became increasingly uncertain, the content of propaganda shifted towards heroic resistance and Stoic themes, replacing the previously prevalent optimism. The Nazis intentionally distorted history and fabricated contemporary versions of historical events based on the wartime needs. Among the many political films in Nazi Germany, "Der grosse König" (The Great King) stands out as particularly representative. This film depicted the life of Frederick II, the King of Prussia, from 1740 to 1786, focusing on his military actions and heroism during the Seven Years' War. To emphasize the correctness of military policies and alleviate the internal tension caused by the stalemate in the war against the Soviet Union, the film accentuated Frederick's strategic foresight and his solitary personality as a military commander. Undoubtedly, the heroic image of Frederick the Great during the Seven Years' War was highly appealing and particularly suitable for a Nazi Germany that had found itself in its first military predicament. Goebbels believed that such messaging would greatly boost morale.

A month after the film's premiere, Goebbels referred to the great burden borne by the Fuhrer: "He faced his fate alone and ours, fought a great struggle for a victorious ending, fought for the survival of our nation.[14]" At the same time, the film proves that the Nazis' fantasies about national socialism are not unprecedented, and the political ideals pursued by the Nazis also have historical origins. The plot of the "Cult of Frederick" film can be traced back to the tendency to glorify Prussia that began in 1933 and even in the 20s of the 20th century[15]. This quality of
conquest by force can also be traced back to older literary and historiographical traditions. Frederick's cinematic characters and legendary plots of achievements establish the legitimacy of Hitler's status as a dictator by mapping contemporary events into a pre-modern, well-defined historical context, and his legal status is derived from historical tradition. As a historical contrast image of Hitler, Frederick actually assumed part of the Führer's psychosocial function. In a speech on "The Great", Goebbels mentioned that he hoped that the Germans would fight to the end like the Prussians in the Seven Years' War and follow Hitler into the "New Era"[16]. He even quoted a quote from a letter written by Frederick to his sister Amalia in 1757, "Victory or death is the only option"[17], taking advantage of the popular sentiment of serving the country to mobilize them in support of the war.

4.2 Mobilizing Youth Emotions through Special Education

Furthermore, Nazi Germany also indoctrinated Nazi ideology in school education, emphasizing Germany's war consciousness and strong military power to highlight the country's war goals and the fighting spirit of the German army. They utilized the students' sense of patriotism, encouraging them to strive and sacrifice for the nation's interests, thereby inducing a large number of young people to join the military and support Nazi Germany's war efforts abroad. This was a means by which the Nazi regime utilized the education system to advance its military objectives and expansionist policies.

Nationalist sentiments were a hotbed for the emergence of Nazism. The post-World War I disaster caused German nationalist sentiment to grow wildly, because most of the university students were from the bourgeoisie or petty bourgeoisie, they were deeply influenced by the traditional conservative consciousness, that is, extreme nationalism and anti-Semitism, and the nationalism promoted by the Nazi Party just catered to the university students, so that the Nazi Party controlled the hearts of a group of college students before it took power. There are also some college students, influenced by the ideology of the "scholar class", which infects the "call for 'defending the nation and the state' through their classroom teaching and publications, college students and social youth who 'yearn for action.'" [18] Their successors "no longer show the 'cultural pessimism' and 'conservatism' of their teachers, but aggressive anti-liberal democracy and anti-Marxism, radical racism and anti-Semitism."[18] They were willing to accept the control of Nazi parties and liked Nazi "special" education because Hitler's Nazi ideology and Nazi politics catered to the psychology and needs of these young people, using the anger of youth to control them.

At the same time, Germany was disarmed after World War I, so that young people were disarmed from military service, they lost the opportunity for glory, and Germany lost its traditional channels of influencing youth. Young people are ignored by society, and the inner impulse to be valued by society and want to show themselves makes young people feel lonely and resentful in their hearts. A series of youth organizations founded by the Nazi Party catered to the young people at this time, allowing them to temporarily find a sense of home. Nazi organizations were very attractive to young people, who experienced the novelty and excitement brought to them by the organization, thus catering to the psychology of young people who seek excitement, fear loneliness, and like a sense of adventure. At the same time, the rebellious psychology of young people is also maximized in organizations, which they see as a world for self-realization and elimination of loneliness. The students of the three elite schools enter the school by the temptation of profit and glory, they aspire to be leaders of the country, they dream of serving the country as officials, and they are proud and energetic of their racial purity and passing through rigorous selection. "The Nazis emphasized the mysterious union of blood and land, the mysterious union of people, people, language and culture, and joined the German Youth League and the romantic spirit."[19] The Nazi Party used the nationalist sentiments of young people to build an "emotional community", giving young people a strong sense of belonging, so that they firmly identified with the Nazi government.

The propaganda of the Nazi Party employed a combination of lies and terror, exploiting the fear of young people in order to compel their involvement in the Nazi cause. The youths were compelled to join the Hitler Youth, otherwise risking unemployment, potential repercussions for their families, and even imprisonment. In order to pursue education, they had to subscribe to the ideology of racialism or geopolitics and join the youth organizations, ensuring their adherence to Nazi ideology. Consequently, joining the Nazi organization, undergoing specialized education, and endorsing Nazi ideology guaranteed safety for the youth and their families.

Furthermore, the Nazi regime extensively utilized deception to manipulate the minds of young people. Students from elite schools were enticed by the allure of power and social status, only later realizing the true nature of their involvement when they were sent to the battlefield and exposed to the horrors of war, some even falling into
captive or death without understanding the deception they had fallen victim to. The Nazi regime established concentration camps and medical experimentation centers to exterminate innocent Jewish people, a fact largely unknown to the majority of young people at the time, illustrating the deceptive nature of the Nazi regime.

Simultaneously, the Nazis exploited the conformity mentality of young people to manipulate their emotions. Witnessing their peers joining the organization, wearing neat uniforms, and parading confidently through the streets, the youth themselves aspired to become part of this collective. After undergoing the "purification of German culture" movement and the purge of educators, a significant portion of young people were left with a void in their hearts and minds, constantly exposed to Nazi ideology both within and outside of school. The cultural "desert" in Germany left them mechanically receptive to the "special education" of the Nazi regime, as it was the only form of education available to them. The Nazi Party established a comprehensive and tightly controlled educational system, from elite schools that specialized in training political cadres to extracurricular organizations, effectively holding German youth firmly in its grip. A significant proportion of young people, lacking the ability to discern, simply went along with the flow, leaving them with little choice but to conform.

5. INFLUENCE: TOLLING THE DEATH KNELL FOR NAZI GERMANY

The propaganda of Nazi Germany was undoubtedly successful in terms of its effectiveness, but the regime's propaganda machine, through highly centralized media control and carefully planned propagandistic activities, attempted to create a perfect national image. However, the long-term oppression and propaganda gradually gave rise to a backlash among the population. People began to question the truthfulness of the propaganda and actively sought ways to resist and oppose the Nazi regime. The propaganda of Nazi Germany sought to consolidate its rule through the incitement of nationalism and racism. However, this propaganda also led to internal divisions within the country. The growing dissatisfaction and conflicts among different groups towards the Nazi regime further weakened its stability and endurance. At the same time, the propaganda of Nazi Germany not only created a sense of resistance among the domestic population, but also attracted criticism and attacks from the international community. The Nazi regime's racism and aggression aroused alertness and condemnation from countries around the world. The economic sanctions and diplomatic isolation imposed by the international community further accelerated its downfall. The military failures of Nazi Germany in World War II also hastened its demise. Although the propaganda attempted to conceal the defeats of the German military, over time, the Nazi regime was unable to hide the actual situation of the war and its military failures. This further undermined the propaganda image of Nazi Germany and accelerated its demise.

Nazi Germany fully utilized and controlled public emotions in its propaganda content and methods. Through emotional rhetoric, emotionally charged language, and the spread and mobilization of emotions, they successfully built an emotional community in Germany, further stimulating the population's identification and support for Nazi ideology. From the effectiveness perspective of emotional communication theory, the propaganda methods of Nazi Germany undoubtedly successfully garnered public support and consolidated the rule of the Third Reich, but also gave rise to corresponding issues. Firstly, although Nazi propaganda controlled public opinion and thought, it did not completely eliminate internal opposition voices and thoughts. Nazi propaganda, while emphasizing nationalism and racism, incited discrimination and persecution against non-German ethnicities and different races, exacerbating social divisions and racial conflicts. Furthermore, the excessive stimulation and exploitation of emotions raised the alertness of a portion of the population and triggered their backlash. Most importantly, Nazi propaganda widely disseminated anti-Semitic ideas and feelings of revenge, which sparked strong opposition and hostility from the international community, pushing Nazi Germany towards its demise under the dual pressure of internal and external troubles.

6. CONCLUSION

From the perspective of emotional communication theory, the propaganda methods of Nazi Germany undoubtedly garnered public support and consolidated the rule of the Third Reich to a certain extent. In terms of propaganda content, Nazi Germany extensively used emotional rhetoric and language to manipulate and mislead the population's values, while also catering to their emotional demands by linking their desire for national rejuvenation with an anti-Semitic ideology. In terms of propaganda methods, Nazi Germany leveraged the "repetition-remembering" effect to facilitate emotional diffusion, creating specific symbols and environments to construct an emotional space for the population. While promoting emotional diffusion, the Nazi government also sought to achieve emotional mobilization and induce people to participate in specific actions, thereby increasing the
effectiveness of emotional communication. However, on the other hand, emotional communication is an important part of news communication, but excessive use of emotions can lead to information distortion and ethical issues. Overly stimulating and exploiting public emotions can also easily provoke people's resistance. The propaganda methods of Nazi Germany serve as a reminder to contemporary media professionals to use emotional communication wisely, find a balance between emotional exploitation and truthful reporting, and advise ordinary people to remain calm and objective in news reporting, not to be influenced by excessive emotional values.

REFERENCES