**New features and trends in international political communication revealed by the Russia Ukraine conflict**

Source: Journal of Shanxi Normal University (Social Science Edition) 2023 No. 1

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Editor: Li Xiang

2023-01-18

<https://www.cssn.cn/gjgc/gjgc_lbt/202301/t20230118_5583678.shtml>

**Abstract:** The communication problem in war is ultimately a political communication problem. Political communication in war reflects the political interests and political goals of all parties in the war, and is a media reflection of the war. From the First World War to today's "Russia-Ukraine conflict", political communication has played an extremely important role in war in different forms. In the "Russia-Ukraine conflict", public opinion has changed from an auxiliary element of military operations in the past to a key factor affecting the direction and even the outcome of the conflict. The "weaponization" of social media in the "Russia-Ukraine conflict" constitutes a new scene of international political communication, showing that international political communication is transforming from macro political propaganda to micro political communication, which means that international political communication dominated by social media with individuals as the main body has strongly impacted and profoundly changed international political communication based on mass communication. The "Russia-Ukraine conflict" has brought profound inspiration to China's international political communication: Chinese academic circles should form a high degree of theoretical awareness of "international political communication"; China should avoid the "discourse trap" of Western media through superb international political discourse art, respond to and fight back against doubts and slander against China; it should strengthen the construction of Internet information platforms and master national sovereignty in cyberspace; and consider social media as a strategic factor of national security.

**Keywords:** international political communication; social media; "Russia-Ukraine conflict"

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　　The "Russia-Ukraine conflict", which has not yet ended, is triggering violent turbulence in the world's political landscape and political order, and has also triggered information and public opinion wars among different political camps around the world. It can be said that the new world landscape "created" by the "Russia-Ukraine conflict" is the most worthy and should be observed and thought about from the perspective of political communication. Political communication theory is urgently needed to explain and guide such a reality in a way that is in line with the pursuit of justice values ​​in human society and brings welfare to all mankind. This article observes and thinks about the "Russia-Ukraine conflict" from the perspective of international political communication.

**I. Political Communication in International Wars**

　　War is the act of using force to resolve political conflicts between political communities or political organizations. The preparation, mobilization, struggle and negotiation in war are inseparable from information dissemination. Information dissemination in war can be roughly divided into two categories: one is the dissemination of military intelligence within the military system by various combat units in order to better coordinate and complete combat tasks; the other is political dissemination between the participating countries and their own people, as well as between the participating countries and neutral countries and hostile countries. Of these two types of dissemination activities, the former is part of the battle tactics, disseminating objective military information, and belongs to the category of military research. The latter, in addition to the armed personnel who directly participate in the battle, also involves a wider range of political subjects and interest groups, disseminating political information with political values ​​and political emotions, and belongs to the category of political communication research.

　　The so-called political communication activities refer to the organic system operation process of the diffusion, acceptance, recognition and internalization of political information in a political community, and the flow process of political information within and between political communities. [1] It can be seen that the definition of political communication already includes political communication activities between countries. During the war, the background of political communication reflects a specific international political order. The subjects and objects of political communication have specific political identities and political positions. The content of political communication contains specific political values ​​and political consciousness. The purpose of political communication also has a realistic orientation. Therefore, political communication in war has very obvious political characteristics. In addition, from military conflicts and diplomatic games between countries to the separation of life and death and homelessness of ordinary people in war, they will trigger political associations in the audience. All political and non-political phenomena will eventually be attributed to politics. Therefore, the communication problem in war is ultimately a political communication problem. Political communication in war reflects the political interests, political consciousness and political purposes of all parties in the war. It is a media reflection of the war and is therefore of great research value.

　　Historically, the first person to pay attention to the issue of political communication in war was Harold D. Lasswell. Lasswell's Propaganda Technique in World War was published in 1927, and it has been nearly a hundred years. From a political perspective, this century has been a century of in-depth development of world history and a century of great turbulence in the world pattern; from a communication perspective, this century has also been a century of leapfrog development of media technology and revolutionary changes in communication forms. Therefore, from Propaganda Technique in World War to the extremely active social media in the "Russia-Ukraine conflict" that this article focuses on, the form of political communication in war has undergone fundamental changes. The main manifestations are: From the historical background, Lasswell studied the world wars that affected many countries, while the "Russian-Ukrainian conflict" was a local conflict with the theme of "peace and development"; from the perspective of media technology, during the two world wars, various countries mainly used print and broadcast as communication tools, while today's "Russian-Ukrainian conflict" mainly uses social media based on Internet technology, with more prominent intelligent features; from the form of communication, from the First World War to the 21st century and even further into the future, mankind will achieve a transition from macro political propaganda to micro political communication. However, in terms of some political communication strategies and tactics, Lasswell's "propaganda skills in world wars" are still applicable in local conflicts in the social media era.

　　Lasswell wrote in his book, "Today, the role of propaganda in international politics, especially in wartime, is being examined more closely than ever before, for many reasons. Around the world, people have developed a new curiosity about this issue."[2] Modern people, who are deeply influenced by social media in their daily lives, are still surprised by the use of social media in modern local wars and the results it has brought after the outbreak of the "Russia-Ukraine conflict". Like Lasswell, they have developed a strong interest in the wartime application of media tools. "The role of public opinion in international politics is particularly worthy of study because the importance of this issue is increasing. We have witnessed the development of a world public, which was formed in part due to the incitement and organization of international propaganda."[3] The phenomenon of the "world public" formed through the media described by Lasswell can describe the situation of the confrontation of opinions and undercurrents in social media under the current Russia-Ukraine situation without any obsolescence. Contemporary people seem to share a similar problem consciousness with Lasswell. Compared to Lasswell’s time, modern wartime propaganda has undergone iterations in terms of tactical design, strategic layout, organizational structure, discourse practice, and concept construction, presenting a situation of “war in the palm of your hand”[4]. Therefore, the use of social media in the “Russia-Ukraine conflict” has become a milestone event in the history of political communication and even the history of human warfare, triggering extensive discussion and research.

**2. Performance and spectatorship: New features of political communication in modern local wars**

　　In an era with the theme of "peace and development", compared with the huge scale and intensity of war in world wars, the number of belligerents in local conflicts is limited, and casualties and losses are relatively small, but the "strategic" characteristics of modern local wars are more prominent. This strategic intention is reflected in the following: modern local wars basically do not aim to destroy a country or completely occupy the territory of another country, but hope to achieve more far-reaching strategic goals through war and win victories beyond military means. In order to achieve strategic goals, it is necessary to use political communication means to destroy the will of the other party, show one's own intentions, occupy the moral high ground while creating public opinion, magnify the fruits of victory in military wars, and expand the deterrent effect of military wars. Therefore, compared with world wars, modern local wars need to pay more attention to the use of political communication means, pay more attention to the feelings and evaluations of neutral countries and bystanders, and the characteristics of "performance" and "watching" are also extremely prominent.

　　In modern local wars, the number of people in the spectator countries is far greater than the number of people in the participating countries. Therefore, it is crucial to make the neutral "spectators" have a favorable ideological tendency. "The most effective role of propaganda is to mobilize members of society to hate the enemy, maintain friendly relations with neutral countries and allies, prompt neutral countries to turn against the enemy, and crush the enemy's indestructible resistance. In short, it is the important influence of propaganda on international attitudes in war that makes it particularly important." [5] The "international attitude" here profoundly affects the national image of the participating countries. The national image in war is crucial, especially in modern local wars.

　　In the "Russia-Ukraine conflict", countries that did not actually participate in the war have become key players influencing the direction of the incident. The cause of the "Russia-Ukraine conflict" is that Ukraine intends to join NATO, which makes Russia feel a security threat, and NATO's relatively indifferent attitude after the outbreak of the conflict has put Ukraine in an embarrassing situation. The "Russia-Ukraine conflict" first broke out in cyberspace. On February 18, 2022, US President Biden's statement that he was convinced that Russia would "invade" Ukraine was quickly spread by major social media, putting great pressure on Russia. Before Putin ordered the Russian army to enter Donbass on February 21, social media was already full of various news about the Russian army's pressure, successfully creating pre-war panic in Ukraine. The United States' use of political communication methods to "fan the flames" in the early stage and the severe sanctions against Russia in coordination with European countries after the conflict also exacerbated the severity of the situation to a certain extent. Long before the conflict broke out, the United States predicted Russia's military action in advance. Although there was a deviation in time, this move created a very tense atmosphere in the global public opinion field. Although the United States has not directly intervened militarily in the "Russia-Ukraine conflict", it has always used its international discourse hegemony to put pressure on Russia. The United States and Western countries have been stirring up trouble and confronting each other in the public opinion field, providing public opinion support for Ukraine by shaping the perception of the global public. Some Western countries have even "sanctioned" and "banned" Russian animals, plants and works of art, which reflects "nonsense" and "small-mindedness" in political communication issues, but has a negative effect on their own image construction.

　　In the "Russia-Ukraine conflict," China has also become the focus of international public opinion. Western countries have used Sino-Russian relations as an excuse to smear China politically and defame its image, arguing that China has the conditions to stop the conflict but is evading responsibility or even reaping the benefits. These false information and "discourse traps" not only damage China's image and distort China's position, but also trigger a split in domestic public opinion by infiltrating and influencing China's domestic media and the Internet. [6]

　　In terms of political communication, Russia, which took the initiative, was slightly passive. The focus of Russia's political communication is to make clear the forced and helpless nature of the "special military operation", attribute the cause of the conflict to Ukraine, the United States and NATO countries, and strive to maintain its image of peace and justice. Russian President Vladimir Putin defended himself in a televised speech on March 16, 2022. He proposed that the special military operation was to save the people of Donbass from genocide and massacre. He accused the Kiev authorities of undermining the Minsk Agreement, trying to possess nuclear weapons and delivery vehicles, intending to join NATO, and conducting biological weapons research projects with the support of the United States. These actions have seriously threatened Russia's security. Russia is acting entirely in self-defense, and Ukraine is the "aggressor." Putin emphasized that the Russian army's actions are not to occupy Ukraine, but to make it a neutral country, to achieve demilitarization and de-Nazification, and to do everything possible to reduce the losses of Ukrainian citizens. Putin also specifically mentioned issues related to political communication. He believed that the global Internet was attacking Russia on a large scale, and an unprecedented information war was beginning. The objectivity and independence advocated by the Western media were completely unreliable, and they deliberately ignored the tragedy in Donetsk. Putin condemned an American social networking site for allowing the publication of an "online killing order" against ordinary Russian citizens on its platform. Putin also hoped that the people of Europe and the United States would realize that the sanctions imposed by these countries on Russia were completely "making excuses for the crime they wanted to accuse them of", which caused the surge in gasoline, energy and food prices in their countries, which was entirely caused by their own actions and had nothing to do with Russia. [7] It can be seen that the rhetoric and logic used by Putin can echo what Lasswell called "propaganda techniques in the world war". Russia has also set up humanitarian corridors many times in special military operations to allow ordinary Ukrainian people to evacuate the war zone. There are also short videos circulating on the Internet showing Russian tank troops taking detours to protect Ukrainian street facilities. These have improved Russia's image as an "aggressor" to a certain extent.

　　Ukraine, which is on the defensive in military battles, has a natural advantage in political communication. With its asymmetric influence in global information flows, Ukraine, which is at a disadvantage in the real geopolitical game, has gained a certain asymmetric advantage. Zelensky has made full use of the global public opinion platform created by the United States and Western countries to suppress Russia, and transformed itself into a political symbol with great political mobilization value among Western audiences. [8] From Zelensky's series of speech videos, it can be seen that Ukraine's discourse strategy is to tie the country's situation and safety to the interests of the United States and Western countries, uphold freedom and democracy to oppose tyranny, occupy the moral high ground, and actively move closer to the United States and Western camp in terms of value pursuit. Zelensky also releases videos at the right time, expressing personal emotions from a first-person perspective, presenting a political communication effect that is completely different from traditional official news footage. In the short video, Zelensky does not wear a suit, a tie, or sit at a desk. He does not need a news officer to light and shoot for him. Instead, he wears a military green T-shirt, has a stubble on his face, red eyes, and looks a little tired, just like an ordinary Ukrainian who has endured sleepless nights. Zelensky's speeches in short videos are often brief and powerful. He does not talk about geopolitics and history, but appeals to personal and emotional matters. His unkempt and casual image not only adapts to the communication habits of social media, but also caters to the political communication preferences of the audience in the social media era. He has subverted the image of national leaders in the traditional sense and gained more sympathy and trust. [9] Zelensky's experience as an actor before entering politics, which was previously criticized, has become an advantage for him to carry out political communication activities, showing the professional level of a "national comedian".

　　Zelensky once called on NATO to provide Ukraine with even 1% of its aircraft and tanks. The number "1%" was set very cleverly. While expressing Ukraine's urgent need for weapons, it also created an image of Ukraine as tragic and weak. This way of expression is "humble" in politics, because this almost begging expression has caused Ukraine to lose its national dignity, but this way of expression is "smart" in terms of communication. Only in this way can Ukraine, which has lost militarily, find a glimmer of hope in order to gain support from the United States and European countries. Judging from the current situation, the "Russia-Ukraine conflict" has caused the international community to transform the original negative image of Ukraine, which was full of corruption, elites fleeing the country, and "European womb", into a tragic image of guarding its homeland, which is a kind of comfort Ukraine has found outside of military struggle.

**III. Weaponization: New Functions of Social Media in International Political Communication**

　　As mentioned above, in modern local wars, the warring parties pay more attention to their own image, the evaluation and attitude of international public opinion, and the pursuit of political strategic goals far outweighs the victory of military operations. Social media can play a huge role in influencing the cognition of "bystanders", shaping the image of the country, and exerting public opinion pressure on hostile countries. It can be said that the communication requirements of modern local wars are in line with the advantages and characteristics of social media, which makes social media play an important role in modern wars and even brings about significant changes in the communication form and strategic thinking in war. Therefore, the "weaponization" of social media is not a simple figurative metaphor. Social media can put pressure on hostile countries through international public opinion, help the warring parties realize their own strategic intentions, achieve effects that ordinary military weapons cannot achieve, and even directly or indirectly affect the outcome of the war. The physical battlefield is no longer the most important stage for conflict, and the narrative of war is more important than the actual behavior that usually controls the war. [10]

　　From radio and television to social media: war propaganda in different media environments

　　During the two world wars, the warring parties mainly used leaflets, radio, newspapers, pamphlets and other means of communication to carry out war propaganda. The Vietnam War was mainly based on television propaganda, which is why it is called the "first television war". Television uses images and sounds to restore the authenticity of the battlefield and the cruelty of the war to the greatest extent, so television has also become an important media factor in stimulating the anti-war consciousness of the American people. In the subsequent Gulf War in 1991 and the Iraq War in 2003, television news played an important role in political communication. It can be seen that the key wars in modern human history are accompanied by the use of emerging media in wars, and the warring parties will do their best to use the existing media means at the time to carry out propaganda wars, information wars, and public opinion wars.

　　Social media’s involvement in reporting and discussing wars is not new. Since the Syrian civil war began in 2011, social media has emerged and played a role in wars. [11] In the war between Azerbaijan and Armenia in 2020, news of the war on both sides spread rapidly with the help of social media. Both sides disseminated battle scenes and live broadcast the battle situation in real time by editing short videos. In the Donbass War in 2014, pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian factions in Ukraine had already engaged in fierce debates on social media, interpreting military operations from their respective standpoints. [12]

　　Some scholars believe that the "Russia-Ukraine conflict" is a war that is highly integrated with local conflicts in the real space and global integrated public opinion wars in cyberspace. Public opinion has risen from the supporting and auxiliary role of military operations in the past to a key role, becoming a key factor affecting the direction and even the outcome of the conflict, including the United States' preheating and momentum building on the eve of the conflict, the role of the media in persuading public opinion and mobilizing public opinion, and the selective concealment and falsification of information. The live broadcast and TikTokization of wars have also led to the highest public opinion demands for peace. At the same time, the "Russia-Ukraine conflict" in 2022 was called the first "short video war" with global live broadcast characteristics in the mobile Internet era. It was "the first war reported on TikTok by individuals who only have smartphones but are super-empowered." [13] "New York Magazine" even synthesized the "Russia-Ukraine conflict" into a new term "WarTok." Therefore, the international political communication in the "Russia-Ukraine conflict" is no longer a public opinion war aimed at public diplomacy between the two sides of the military conflict in the traditional sense, but a new form of communication with social media platforms as the main communication channel and the main goal of shaping and strengthening people's cognition, presenting the characteristics of information explosion, national participation, and full live broadcast. [14]

　　Weaponized social media

　　Social media is a form of media based on Internet applications and Web 2.0 technology that allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content. [15] The book LikeWar: The Weaponization of Social Media, published in 2012, argues that social media is moving towards weaponization. The Internet is changing war and politics, just as war and politics are changing the Internet. Through the weaponization of social media, the "Twitter War" has also caused real-world casualties. Virally spread misinformation has not only changed the outcome of the war, but also changed the fate of the country. As a result, war, technology and politics have merged into a new battle space on mobile phones. [16] The weaponization of social media is reflected in the following aspects: First, the participants in the public opinion war are no longer limited to the parties to the conflict, but have expanded to netizens around the world; second, the war process is broadcast live by the whole people, and the Internet makes public information highly synchronized with the development of the situation. The concreteness of war has led to increased public opinion pressure on the parties to the conflict; third, Internet technology companies that control social media platforms have a strong dominance over the trend of public opinion through manipulation methods such as closing accounts and pushing information. In the Internet age, polarized public opinion has a much greater influence on the course of conflict, and may even influence or change the military deployment of the conflicting parties. In a sense, the cyberspace public opinion war is a cyber war for the right to speak on the legitimacy of the war and the right to interpret the course of the war. [17]

　　It can be seen that social media not only plays a powerful role in political mobilization and organizational communication, but also demonstrates unprecedented public opinion shaping and agenda setting capabilities[18]. It has been integrated into the winning mechanism of information warfare, affecting the course and even the outcome of the war[19]. In the "Russia-Ukraine conflict", the attacks and curses on social media, the struggle and defense of the moral high ground, are as intense and fierce as the military battlefield in the real world. The people of various neutral countries and onlookers will also join the "online battle" on social media, enthusiastically "choose sides" and express their opinions, which has become a unique international political communication landscape in modern wars. In the era of social media, the open information network enables all audiences to receive political information. Therefore, the ability of international political communication subjects to integrate information is crucial, and social media has developed into an important battlefield.

　　Weaponized “Words”

　　It is not new for warring parties to use discourse, rhetoric, narrative and other means to launch a full-scale attack on their opponents. However, in modern local wars, with the support of new media technology, the means and expressions of the warring parties in the "propaganda war" are more diverse and more "aggressive" and "lethal". After experiencing the two world wars, modern people are very sensitive and disgusted with words such as "armed aggression", "fascism" and "nuclear war", and these words have become discourse weapons and communication labels in the "propaganda war" between modern countries. Zelensky once said that Russia is the country that supports terrorism the most in the world, and that this special military operation is also of a terrorist nature, in order to deconstruct the legitimacy of Russia's "special military operation". [20] Information dissemination is the primary function of social media, so the "aggression" in the dissemination of discourse and rhetoric has become a prominent feature of the "weaponization" of social media.

　　Weaponized “truth”

　　“Truth is the first victim of war.”[21] In a state of war and conflict, it seems that the amount of information is growing explosively, and all kinds of war information are constantly flowing in. However, in fact, much of the information is difficult to verify or disprove, and the flow of information is not as smooth as in peacetime. In particular, many “humanitarian” issues can easily excite the audience, causing them to ignore the truth and be misled by the content on social media, resulting in the “post-truth” phenomenon. For this reason, many official and unofficial media will organize fact-checking work, and even use “fact-checking” as an important strategy for weaponizing social media, by emphasizing the authenticity of the information they publish or disseminate, or refuting and clarifying some rumors to establish their own positive image. When the “Russia-Ukraine conflict” first broke out, “real-time images” forged from war games were circulated on social media platforms, and there were also “real-time scenes” pretending to be videos of the Russian-Ukrainian military fighting in previous years. In addition, Ukraine has also been constantly releasing unverified news such as the annihilation of Russian troops and the death of senior Russian generals, in order to cover up the real situation on the battlefield and stimulate the fighting spirit of its own army. Chechnya even hired a "special actor" who looked like Zelensky to film a video of Zelensky being arrested and admitting his mistake and surrendering in public. Highly restored videos are widely circulated on social media, which can not only confuse the audience, but also undermine the will of the other party. In the conflict, the safety of the world's largest aircraft, the An-225, has attracted widespread attention from netizens around the world. As early as February 24, 2022, there were rumors on various social platforms that the aircraft had been destroyed, and then there was a "rumor-refuting" message. After confirming that the aircraft had been damaged in the war, both Russia and Ukraine accused each other of being responsible. At this time, the An-225 has become a political symbol, which not only condenses the global people's attention to the war situation and their yearning for peace, but also becomes a point of public opinion confrontation between Russia and Ukraine to maintain their positive image and condemn the other side's "unjust actions". Fake news, as a strategic narrative, is a tool for political actors to clarify their positions on specific issues and shape the views of domestic and foreign audiences. Creating false news stories is not only for reporting events, but also for building identities and changing the audience's existing ideas. [22] In essence, the so-called “fact-checking” is just a pragmatic discourse strategy to cover up the intention of the media war - that is, under the banner of “fact-checking”, it lures the audience to relax their vigilance. Although there is an element of seeking truth, it often goes beyond discussing the facts. In essence, it is a fierce competition among various stakeholders for the right to narrate and define the conflict. [23]

　　Weaponized “morality”

　　Social media not only spreads information, but also outputs value. Using universally recognized moral principles to criticize and attack is not exclusive to the social media era. Compared with world wars, modern local wars pay more attention to humanitarian protection and reducing civilian casualties. Social media restores and displays the scenes of war, making armed conflicts always subject to the questioning and consideration of humanitarian values. In this "Russia-Ukraine conflict", more and more Ukrainian users use social media to pick up their phones and record the tragic scenes of devastation and destruction of homes without being armed, which arouses widespread sympathy from the international community and uses social media as a weapon to make up for the lack of national armed forces. During this period, a video circulated on TikTok, in which a group of Ukrainian civilians forced a Russian soldier with a gun to retreat step by step. They held mobile phones and cameras and shouted to him, "Shoot, the reporter is here", and the Russian soldier could only fire a warning shot into the air, but did not dare to shoot. The sharp contrast between the behavior of soldiers and civilians is quite ironic, and the communication tool "defeated" the weapons and equipment. This also reflects a reality mentioned above. In previous world wars, wars and battles often aimed to maximally destroy the enemy's manpower. In modern local wars under the influence of social media, any military action may be exposed. Under the "onlookers" of the global public, many subtle details will be magnified by social media, and many secret actions will be made public by social media. What is more subversive is that the immediacy, openness and randomness of social media communication make it difficult for "political gatekeepers" to react in time, and matters that require secret discussions, temporary rulings and secret actions are no longer completed, thus reshaping the internal and external order and information flow of political communication during the war.

　　The greatest "merit" of social media in the "Russia-Ukraine conflict" is that it enables people around the world to experience the cruelty of war even as "spectators", so that people cherish peace more. Faced with the bloodiness, ruthlessness and brutality of war, modern people who have lived in peace for a long time have been deeply shocked. In particular, social media uses text, images, sounds, videos, etc. to stimulate the audience's emotions in multiple dimensions, giving them a strong sense of presence. The war scenes recorded and disseminated in the form of short videos can make the audience feel compassion, pain, sadness and other empathy in just a few seconds, and have great dissemination efficiency. All of these have caused people to reflect and resonate, allowing people to experience a virtual "war trial" on the Internet.

　　Weaponized “Platforms”

　　In the era of social media, the accelerated platformization of the international communication pattern has become increasingly obvious. The digital power held by super Internet platform companies has shown the characteristics of monopoly and centralization [24]. Commonly used social media platforms are controlled by a few American multinational companies. This makes the political communication relationship between countries in modern local wars very complex and subtle. The United States and Western countries have passed administrative regulations, and the regulatory authorities have notified media operating platforms to block, block, or even delete accounts that publish information that is beneficial to Russia, and even modify the platform operating rules to allow non-compliant information that is not beneficial to Russia, including hate speech and very typical false information, to obtain the right to circulate one-way on the platform. [25] This situation is very unfavorable to Russia. It is equivalent to the United States and Western countries strangling Russia's "tongue", and Russia is helpless. According to foreign media reports, due to European officials' pressure on major social platforms to require platforms to take restrictive measures on "pro-Russian" propaganda, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have announced that they will restrict the content published by Russian state media on their platforms. Meta (Facebook's parent company) will block information published by Russian news agencies RT and Sputnik in EU countries after receiving "requests from governments and EU officials to take further measures against Russian state media." It will also shut down a "pro-Russian" disinformation propaganda website and implement "algorithmic restrictions" on Russian state media accounts to reduce the speed and scope of their content. Twitter also blocks Russian state media from posting messages on Twitter as much as possible. YouTube, one of the world's largest video sites, has blocked related accounts and content of Russian state media, including RT, in Ukraine, and has greatly limited the amount of content related to Russian state media recommended on its platform. [26] TikTok and Microsoft have also banned RT and Sputnik from spreading in EU countries. Russian users have also encountered problems when using the above social media software. This seems to explain why voices from Ukraine are always heard on social media, but the threat posed to Russia by NATO's eastward expansion is relatively weakened, because it is difficult for voices supporting Russia to spread outside of Russia through social media. [27] Compared with economic sanctions, this type of “platform sanctions” has caused Russia to suffer immeasurable “internal injuries” during the conflict. In the era of social media, the United States and other countries may use the backend authority of large multinational Internet companies to block a country, completely silencing its media system or even paralyzing it.

　　In summary, in addition to military struggle, the two sides of the "Russia-Ukraine conflict" also used social media to launch information warfare and public opinion warfare in the virtual world. The "Russia-Ukraine conflict" marks the transition of international political communication from the "living room war" of the television era to the "palmtop war" mode of the smart media era, showing strategic, short video and emotional characteristics. The focus of the public opinion war has shifted from "information dissemination" to "cognitive construction", and from "viewpoint dissemination" to "emotional guidance". Political communication has also evolved from the "graphic information war" dominated by mass media to the "algorithm cognitive war" dominated by social media. [28] It can be seen that the social media in the "Russia-Ukraine conflict" is also different from previous social media, showing a trend of intelligent development. If the first generation of social media simply played a social attribute to facilitate communication and exchange of opinions between "friends", then the social media in the smart media era is more complex. The combination of social media and intelligent algorithms can strengthen or subvert the audience's existing cognition through means such as precise push. Therefore, compared with the traditional "public opinion war", modern social media can not only provide the audience with strong sensory stimulation and emotional impact through concise content, short videos and texts, but also realize the audience's cognitive construction over a long period of time, making it stable and solidified.

**4. From macro to micro: New trends in international political communication**

　　In the ongoing "Russia-Ukraine conflict", compared with Russia's "grand national narrative", Ukrainian President Zelensky's "micro-difference narrative" displayed through social media has seized the "high ground" of international morality. The fragmented "personal narrative" of global netizens has also become a new variable in the game of international political communication. [29] What does this fact mean in theory? It means that from the First World War to today's "Russia-Ukraine conflict", international political communication is transforming from macro-political propaganda to micro-political communication. The international political communication form dominated by social media with individuals as the main body has strongly impacted and profoundly changed the international political communication that has always been based on mass communication. This judgment is not only applicable to political communication in international wars or international military conflicts, but is increasingly applicable to international political communication as a whole.

　　Our definition of micro-political communication is: "the operation of an organic system of political information diffusion, acceptance, identification, and internalization based on micro-social life within a political community empowered by modern communication technology and with individuals as the main body."[30] From this definition, it can be seen that micro-political communication is not satisfied with simply redefining political communication with micro-communication media such as Weibo, WeChat, and short videos. Instead, it emphasizes that under the influence of modern media technology, while achieving the concise and powerful content production and the convenience and speed of instant communication, the old macro-political propaganda with national politics as the main body and mass communication as the main tool is transformed into micro-political communication with social media as the main tool, and the focus of the entire political communication is tilted towards social individuals in terms of narrative logic, discourse selection, value pursuit, and meaning competition.

　　In military wars, the opposition between "macro" and "micro" has existed since ancient times. However, due to the limitations of media technology, in previous macro-political propaganda, the rolling torrent of war diluted the joys and sorrows of individuals, and the narrative logic of "winners take it all" concealed the voices of people accusing war and praying for peace. From macro-political propaganda to micro-political communication, the form of political communication has changed from single-point communication to multi-point communication. The difficult-to-suppress multiple voices have broken the monopoly of macro-political propaganda on information, allowing ordinary people's reflections on war to be transformed into media agendas and have a huge impact. In this "Russia-Ukraine conflict", a short video recorded a Ukrainian resident returning to his home that was bombarded by artillery fire and playing a piece of music at the piano. The melodious and soothing piano sound formed a sharp contrast with the ruins of broken walls, which made people sigh. In these few seconds, the right and wrong, success and failure, honor and disgrace in the war seemed no longer important, and people just wanted to save ordinary people who were displaced in the war.

　　The advancement of Internet technology has given ordinary people the right to record and express themselves. At least from the perspective of communication opportunities and conditions, mankind has entered a world of unprecedented freedom and equality, and the general public is also intoxicated by it. The development of mobile Internet technology has lowered the threshold for communication, breaking the monopoly and arrogance of professionalism. The audience, who once lived on the receiving end of political propaganda for a long time, now has the opportunity and ability to create hot topics, set agendas, influence the order of communication, and thus influence the development of events. Of course, contemporary people do not have to fall into the ecstasy of "respecting the present and despising the past." Internet technology has also brought about a series of negative political communication phenomena such as "post-truth", reverse news, information cocoons, deep fakes, and group polarization, which have emerged in an endless stream and have affected people's correct cognition and reasonable judgment. [31]

　　It can be seen that social media can indeed break the monopoly of old political propaganda on political sources, political discourse and political views through the advancement of media technology. Political propaganda no longer has the absolute right to release information and the final right of interpretation. However, when people get out of the suppression of "propaganda", they fall into the myth of "technology". Social media gives ordinary people the power to carry out political communication, but this does not mean that people can gain independent and rational judgment. In essence, this is still a kind of "manipulation" and "suggestion" as Lasswell called it. The "manipulation" here actually contains two characteristics: one is that political communicators have a strong sense of subjectivity and purpose orientation; the other is that they can produce a strong enough influence. It's just that the subject of manipulation has evolved from the known country and the political communicators under its control to individuals, institutions or platforms hidden at the other end of the network. Especially under the influence of algorithm technology and precise push, the filtering and guidance of technology have become more hidden and powerful, making it difficult to guard against. The manipulation of "politics" has been replaced by the manipulation of "technology".

　　On the other hand, the prominent feature of micro-political communication lies in its social attributes. From the perspective of media technology alone, social media has reduced the cost of communication and enabled unprecedented interconnection between people. However, the cruel reality is that debates on various issues on the Internet platform have never stopped, and these debates often escalate into attacks and abuses and even verbal violence. In this "Russia-Ukraine conflict", Chinese netizens, as "bystanders", also had a huge debate on the "justice" of military actions. The public opinion field once showed a scene of swords being drawn and gunpowder filled, and the opposition of opinions and attitudes occurred not only between strangers on the Internet, but even between friends who knew each other well in reality. It is particularly important to note that the power distribution in the cyber-cognitive field often shows a mismatch with the real world. As has happened before on a global scale, when the facts of the objective world finally burst the bubble of subjective cognition, the first thing that appears is most likely not reflection on subjective cognition, but the venting of anger based on the frustration-attack mechanism. The secondary damage caused by the "Russia-Ukraine conflict" should also become one of the keys to recognize and understand the subsequent development of the Russia-Ukraine crisis and be prepared to respond. [32]

　　The trend of development from macro political propaganda to micro political communication is irreversible. News is the current historical writing. Furthermore, under the influence of micro political communication, it is unknown whether the social memory day after day can change the historical logic of "winners take it all". Faced with the arrival of micro political communication based on social media, people do not have to be ecstatic about the false freedom of "everyone has a microphone", nor do they have to lose confidence in the massive amount of information that is difficult to distinguish between true and false and the irreconcilable confrontation of public opinion. Every revolutionary progress in human society will inevitably bring about disputes between conservatism and progress, and will also endure strong pain in the process of adapting to change. The drastic changes from macro to micro in international political communication in the great changes that have not been seen in a century, with the "Russia-Ukraine conflict" as the focus, should become a major practical and theoretical issue that current political communication theory researchers should focus on and think deeply about.

**5. The implications of the “Russia-Ukraine conflict” for China’s international political communication**

　　The ongoing "Russia-Ukraine conflict" embodies the typical characteristics of a modern local war involving major powers, both in terms of its communication form and in terms of the form of war. It will surely become a landmark historical event. It will have a significant impact on the world's political and economic structure and the state power situation. It gives us endless food for thought both in practice and in theory.

　　First, from a theoretical perspective, contemporary Chinese academic circles should develop a theoretical consciousness of “international political communication”. At present, “international communication” has become an academic hotspot, but current research on “international communication” is scattered and confined to the single discipline and theoretical framework of communication studies, and is increasingly lacking sufficient explanatory power for the reality that is happening. We believe that it is urgent to extract a new theory of “international political communication” from the broad “international communication” in order to expand the disciplinary perspective of “international communication”, be inclusive, and form a joint force. Furthermore, for “international political communication”, “micro-international political communication” is a newer research direction. [33]

　　Second, China and Russia and Ukraine have maintained very friendly diplomatic relations in recent years, and the armed conflict between the two is a huge test of China's diplomatic capabilities. Faced with the current complex international situation, China has demonstrated a very high level of foreign exchange wisdom and international political communication. It has not only adhered to its own position and attitude on issues of principle, but also highlighted the supreme value pursuit of "peace" based on the right and wrong of the matter itself, and worked hard to ease the situation, resolve the crisis, and rebuild peace; at the same time, it can also effectively avoid the "discourse trap" set by some Western media through the art of political discourse, and calmly respond to and fight back against the doubts and slanders against China. So far, the "Russia-Ukraine conflict" has not ended. China should sum up its experience and take this opportunity to improve its international political communication capabilities, lead the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind, and reflect China's mission as a responsible major country.

　　Third, we must strengthen the construction of Internet information platforms and firmly grasp the national sovereignty of cyberspace. In this "Russia-Ukraine conflict", the United States used the Internet platform to impose sanctions on Russia, which greatly weakened Russia's political communication capabilities in the international community. In the Internet age, social media platforms are operated by large Internet companies and are not directly controlled by the country. This is equivalent to the fact that the Internet "microphones" of many countries may be "confiscated" by other countries at any time. Therefore, the development of Internet information platforms, especially the cultivation of social media platforms with strong influence and a wide audience of users, is of great strategic significance and political value, both in peacetime and in wartime.

　　Since entering the Internet era, China has begun to focus on developing a relatively independent Internet platform matrix, with a low degree of dependence on American Internet giants, which has laid a good historical beginning and political direction for the development of China's Internet political communication. In the era of in-depth development of the Internet, how to further safeguard the national sovereignty of cyberspace and make various social media platforms such as instant messaging and short videos bigger, stronger, more refined and better requires the cultivation and support of national policies, as well as multiple efforts in technology, marketing, services, products, innovation and other aspects.

　　Fourth, in the face of the "Russia-Ukraine conflict", China should seriously sum up its experience and consider social media as a strategic factor of national security. China's peaceful rise today still faces a very complex external environment and many potential threats. To this end, political and military communications must establish a reasonable "peace-war conversion" mechanism. Just as the Chinese People's Liberation Army, relevant journalists and competent departments must also meet the requirements of "coming when called, fighting when coming, winning when fighting, and never giving up", the image of the People's Liberation Army as a mighty, civilized, and peaceful force must be shaped in both wartime and peacetime. It is necessary to focus on the dissemination of non-war military operations and also prepare to win the information war in the social media era.

**VI. Conclusion**

　　To this day, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine has not ended, and the outcome of the war is difficult to determine. Although social media cannot completely make up for Ukraine's relative military weakness, the new trends and changes in political communication in modern local military conflicts are already very obvious, and its underlying logic has quietly changed in the physical field, information infrastructure field and perception field of cyberspace. [34] "Politics dominates communication", and the political and economic interests of a country are still the decisive factors in determining relations between countries. Countries can only use communication means to maximize their strategic goals based on their objective strength. With the iteration of communication technology, the control and application capabilities of various countries for emerging media are different, resulting in a more prominent cognitive gap between major powers regarding security, order and values. The construction of international political communication capabilities will also be the focus of various countries. Therefore, whether from the perspective of the development of the post-Cold War international order or the national strategic game strategy under the influence of Internet technology, the "Russia-Ukraine conflict" will have a profound impact on the future, and we look forward to deeper observation and thinking from the theoretical community.

**Notes:**

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