Propaganda in Polish media studies: Visual aspect

Łukasz Szurmiński
University of Warsaw
l.szurminski@uw.edu.pl
ORCID: 0000-0002-2918-6502

ABSTRACT
The purpose of this article is to characterize the evolution of research on the phenomenon of propaganda, with particular emphasis on the achievements of Polish science in the period from 1918 to the present. Research method: A review of selected literature on the subject. Results and conclusions: Referring to specific historical stages (the interwar period and World War II, the years 1945–1989 and the period after 1989) and the political conditions associated with them, the main themes and subject of research relevant to these periods were characterized. Research on: mechanisms of propaganda, use of visual tools and forms, specific institutions or projects (case studies) was identified. Cognitive value: Possible directions for further research in this area were indicated. It was also confirmed that the study of propaganda falls within the mainstream of social communication and media sciences, drawing also on the achievements of political science and history.

KEYWORDS
biometrics, media studies, persuasion, propaganda, visual propaganda

Propaganda, including visual propaganda, can be analyzed in two ways. We can try to describe it in a comprehensive way, from a historical perspective, starting from antiquity up to modern times. We can also focus our research interests on one selected historical period, placing propaganda messages in a broader context of social, political and historical events. Each approach has its advantages and disadvantages as well as its limitations. For the purpose of the analysis presented in this article, visual propaganda has been defined as one in which the dominant form of communication is visual stimuli. It is not the author’s intention to present a cross-sectional
historical background of visual propaganda. There is no comprehensive study of this type that would be devoted solely to visual propaganda over the centuries in the literature. The introductory part presents several examples of the use of visual messages in propaganda. However, the main aim of the article is to try to answer such questions as since when propaganda in Poland has been an object of scientific reflection, what was the contribution of Polish researchers to this process, and to what extent Polish media experts were involved in the study of propaganda in Poland, including its visual type. The text also highlights some new phenomena related to propaganda as well as new trends in research, especially on the visual side of propaganda messages. The article was prepared using a critical analysis of literature and source materials. As indicated in the title, it concerns the topic of propaganda, especially one using visual communication techniques, undertaken by Polish researchers. Foreign publications are cited selectively, as a context for the presented issues. The results are presented in chronological order.

1. Introduction: History, propaganda and visual propaganda

As noted by Lesław Wojtasik (1987) in the introduction to his book Propaganda wizualna: “Historical records show that already in ancient Greece we can observe forms of organized visual influence on selected social groups in order to shape social awareness” (pp. 5–6). For a long time, however, conducting propaganda activities consisted in collecting and then using current practical experiences and was devoid of scientific reflection. This situation resulted from the fact that for many centuries propagandists had a rather limited arsenal of media that could be used to present propaganda content. Architectural structure, painting and sculpture could be used in this context, but they had their limitations, related mainly to the perception of content by recipients. They required knowledge about the world and sufficient interpretative skills to allow for reading and decoding of the message in the way intended by the sender. These media also lacked a certain kind of bluntness, which would allow, as a Dutch psychologist Joost Abraham Maurits Meerloo (2015) put it, “to rape the minds” of the recipients.

Significant changes in the scope of visual propaganda took place at the end of the 18th century and in the 19th century. What blazed the path for a wider use of visual propaganda messages was propaganda in the times of Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Its example is this graphic presenting a caricature of a fat monk using the devil as bagpipes (Fig. 1).

The interpretation of this painting is not clear, some authors read it the other way round, seeing in it the devil playing the “monk bagpipes.” Some sources claim that the “monk bag” does not depict Matin Luther, as stated by the publications cited below, but a representative of the contempo-

Fig. 1. Erhard Schön, The Devil with Bagpipes, 1535.
Source: British Museum (n.d.).
secondary monasticism, who is condemned as inspired by the devil. However, the description on the
British Museum website clearly suggests it: „A devil playing the bagpipe on a man’s head. From
the resemblance the head bears to Luther I am inclined to think this an allegorical allusion of
Satan instigating M Luther while he plays on his nose.” (British Museum, n.d.). It is difficult to
agree with this interpretation because the text attached to the graphic talked about a situation in
which the clergy can no longer tell fairy tales to their followers due to the Lutheran Reformation.
However, no matter who is presented in the graphic, it is one of the early examples of an effec-
tive use of image in propaganda, even in a situation when the recipient does not understand the
accompanying text, as noted by Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell: „The meaning here is
obvious: The clergy speaks the language of the devil. This is a particularly effective and direct
form of visual propaganda, even for those who would not read the accompanying text” (Jowett

In turn, the American Revolution (1775–1783) and the Napoleonic Wars (1803–1815) are ex-
amples of conflicts in which leaflets containing both text and image were used on a massive scale
(Jowett & O’Donnell, 2006, pp. 74–92). One example is a graphic titled Join, or Die designed by
caricaturist Benjamin Franklin in 1754 (Fig. 2). It was used repeatedly, most extensively during
the American Revolution (Cavna, 2015).

When it comes to technical solutions related to the distribution of propaganda materials, a
novelty in the field was dropping propaganda leaflets from balloons in 1870 during the Franco-
Prussian War (1870–1871). Thanks to this, propaganda materials could be found behind enemy
defense lines and weaken the enemy’s morale both in the rear of the battlefield and in the battle-
field itself (Manning, 2004, pp. 159–163; Thomson, 2001, p. 60). Previously, from 1907 on, kites
were used to drop leaflets:

„War propaganda leaflets were first dropped from the air in May 1807, when Admiral Thomas
Cochrane conducted ‘leaflet raid’ on the coast of France. The leaflets, ‘printed proclamations
addressed to French people’, were tied in bundles and carried on the strings of kites flown from a
ship in the Chanel. Slow-burning fuses released the leaflets by stages and the wind carried them
over enemy territory” (Rickards, 1919, p. 10).

![Fig. 2. Benjamin Franklin, Join, or Die, 1754. Source: Cavna, 2015.](https://mediastudies.eu)
From World War I, airplanes began to be used to drop leaflets, although there were some exceptions to this rule. During the war, between 1915 and 1917, in response to German leaflet operations, the British also sent their airplanes over enemy territory. The flights were abandoned after four British airmen were captured and two of them were sentenced to 10 years in prison. After this, only balloons were used to drop leaflets until the end of the war (Taylor, 2003, p. 187). However, this does not change the fact that to this day airplanes are one of the most effective way of disseminating propaganda materials (Clark & Christie, 2005; Friedman, n.d.; Tracy, n.d.).

It is not very far from the long reach of communication senders to mass distribution, but it took about a hundred years and revolutions in the area of printing (steam engine, typesetting machine), communication (Morse telegraph, Bell telephone) and content dissemination (news agencies like Associated Press, Havas, Deutsche Presse Agentur, Reuters) before we could talk about reaching mass audience with various content, mainly through the press (Briggs & Burke, 2010, pp. 147–151, 182–202, 247–265; Chapman, 2005, pp. 104–118).

In the interwar period, also radio began to be used to spread propaganda content (Newcourt-Nowodworski, 2008, pp. 33–37). The mass use of the press and radio as well as leaflets and posters during World War I prompted researchers to take a closer look at the processes of propaganda communication, their effectiveness and the techniques used. This is the time when we can talk about the institutionalization of propaganda, a term that appears in the already mentioned work Propaganda and Persuasion (Jowett & O’Donnell, 2006).

The most frequently cited works from this period belong to American authors such as Harold D. Lasswell (1927), Edward Bernays (1928), William Wishart Biddle (1931) and Alfred McClung Lee (Lee & Lee, 1938). These works cannot be left out from any literature review due to their timeless nature, but they are not the subject of the analysis presented in this article, which concerns the research of Polish scientists.

2. Polish research on propaganda

Polish research on propaganda will be presented in three parts: studies concerning the interwar period and World War II, the period of Polish People’s Republic (communist Poland), and the period from the change of the political system to the present.

2.1. Years 1918–1945

In the interwar period, Polish contribution to research on propaganda was initially more practical than scholarly in nature, as evidenced by the activity of two institutions established in 1820: the Office of Internal Propaganda and the Office of Foreign Propaganda. The moment of their establishment clearly indicates that they were created in order to mobilize Poles during the Polish-Bolshevik War of 1920 and to seek support abroad for the newly emerging state. While a selection of documents illustrating the activities of the latter institution has already been published (Jablonowski, Janowski, & Kosseski, 2002), the documents presenting the activity of the former, located in the Archive of New Records, are still waiting to be processed.

When it comes to scientific publications from this period, we should mention a widely cited book by Tadeusz Teslar (1938) about the Polish-Bolshevik War, as well as several works of a more general, theoretical nature, including studies by Władysław Baliński (1930), Tadeusz Unkiewicz (1937) and Jerzy Życi (1936, 1937), which refer to the propaganda techniques of the time and their practical applications. A curiosity supplementing the above list of publications is a little book by Aleksander T. Lutosławski O propagandzie (1942), which was published in London. The sources cited here do not deal with the topic of visuality in propaganda; they are devoted to the discussion techniques based on linguistic persuasion.
2.2. Years 1945–1989

After World War II, Polish research on propaganda gained an ideological dimension. On the one hand, the publications of this period referred to the scientific achievements (definitions, classifications and typologies) of the previously mentioned American researchers from the interwar period, but on the other hand, they were part of the dichotomous division of the world in which the West practiced propaganda and disinformation while the so-called “people’s democracy countries” were mainly concerned with fighting for peace, naturally using peaceful methods.

Probably one of the first publications on propaganda was a book by Józef Sosnowski Teoria propagandy w zarysie (1948). In the following two decades, a large part of the theoretical and practical works in the literature of the subject were translations of publications by authors of Soviet origin, e.g. the series of books by Ivan Smirnov (1950, 1951). An example of a Polish work on the theoretical aspects of propaganda, published roughly two decades after the end of WWII, is a book by Fryderyk Malczewski Z teorii i praktyki propagandy: wybrane zagadnienia (1967).

Apart from them, there were also books by Polish authors focusing on training and practical aspects of propaganda, e.g. a book by Józef Gliniarz (1956). Another group were publications by the Ministry of National Defense intended to unmask Western imperialism. They perpetuated the ideological division of the world and the Manichean vision of reality, which was an important construct of propaganda messages. Numerous publications fulfilling this role include collective works such as: O ideologii wojennej imperializmu amerykańskiego (1952), Agitator pracuje (1950), Dywersja ideologiczno-polityczna imperializmu (1967), Z teorii i praktyki propagandy (1967), Mechanizmy propagandy syjonistycznej (1968), Amerykańska propaganda socjologiczna (1969). The next group consisted of collections of documents, guidelines and training speeches on propaganda and agitation activities prepared by various instances of the Polish United Workers’ Party. Examples of such publications include: O agitacji: (uchwały, instrukcje, materiały) (1953) and Zadania Komitetu Powiatowego w dziedzinie propagandy i agitacji: stenogram wykładu wygłoszonego na kursie w lipcu 1950 roku (1950).

A publication that merits a slightly longer discussion is Kulisy czarnej propagandy (1966). It is one of the few examples of a book on propaganda by an author from behind the Iron Curtain translated in that period. In this case, it is a translation of selected fragments of a book authored by Denis Sefton Delmer, expert and creator of the British black propaganda apparatus, which was behind most of the psychological warfare activities carried out in the years 1940–1945 from the territory of Great Britain. In fact, it is a biographical book, but as noted by the Polish publisher in the editorial comment, D.S. Delmer is considered one of the best specialists in black propaganda (1966, p. 3).

As regards publications from the analyzed period that refer to the visuality of propaganda messages, two works deserve special attention. The first in chronological order is Satyra w konspiracji (Fig. 3), published by the Ministry of National Defense in 1958 (2nd extended edition). In over 350 A4 pages, the publication presents materials created in the years 1939–1945 and used as weapons of Polish society in its fight against the German occupier, such as satirical periodicals, leaflets, drawings and inscriptions on walls, lampposts and fences, as well as facsimiles of newspapers published by the Polish Underground State but disguised as Nazi newspapers for Poles.

The second publication is Szara księga. Polityka ekspansji i neohitleryzmu w Niemczech zachodnich (1968), a book documenting the rebirth of national-socialist and nationalist tendencies in the Federal Republic of Germany (Fig. 4). The book is an interesting example of the analysis of visual materials that can be classified as propaganda, while being of a propaganda nature itself.
The selection of its content was not guided by scientists but by the Supreme Council of the People’s Unity Front of the Derman Democratic Republic.

The publications from this period which do not refer to visuality as such but deal with art in general are complemented by the brochure *Sztuka i polityka* (1959), addressed to political officers of the Polish People’s Army. Some of the chapters have highly metaphorical titles e.g. *Why Abstractionism?, Atmosphere on Mount Parnassus* or *The Bitterness of Disappointment*, which must have been a considerable intellectual challenge for the intended readers of the brochure.

The 1970s and 1980s constitute another stage in the development of propaganda research. Many books on the theoretical aspects of propaganda were then published and several Polish specialists, whose books remain cited to this day (especially if ideological threads are omitted), appeared on the scene.

Publications from this period are best discussed starting with multi-authored studies, the entire series of which was published, for example, by Książka i Wiedza. These include: *Problemy efektywności propagandy partyjnej* (1974), *Informacja – propaganda – opinia publiczna* (1974), and *Problemy psychologii społecznej a propaganda* (1975), all authored by Soviet researchers, as well as *Teoria i praktyka propagandy* (1985), containing texts by Polish researchers. In addition to publications commonly available in bookstores, there were many training volumes, intended for the internal use by the issuing institutions, e.g. *Psychologiczno-społeczne podstawy propagandy* (1979) or a well-known and often cited even later publication by Walery Pisarek *Język służby propagandzie* (1976), as well as a periodical publication issued by the In-

The Polish propaganda researchers from this period include such scholars as:
- Józef Mazurek – theory of propaganda, social information (1974, 1979),
- Stanisław Kwiatkowski – words and emotions in propaganda (1974),

As regards the issue of visuality in propaganda, special attention should be paid to the publications of Lesław Wojtasik, who, in addition to works on the psychology of propaganda, wrote at least three books on the visual aspect of propaganda (1975b, 1977, 1987), in which he analyzed such issues as the concept of visual propaganda, the role and importance of color in propaganda messages, forms of visual propaganda and the exposure of propaganda content. Another very interesting publication from this period is the book published for the 30th anniversary of the Polish People’s Republic titled Propaganda wizualna (1974), which is a compendium of practical knowledge about visual propaganda, encouraging its readers to use the proposed patterns for colorful boards and installation designs (Figs. 5–8). Interestingly, the publication includes no mention of its author(s) and publisher.

A separate category of studies from this period are those that dealt with propaganda activities in the context of specific historical events or referred to specific authors. Since the number one enemy of the “people’s democracy” camp at the time was the United States, this was reflected in the publications by, for instance, Andrzej Ławrowski (1975), Czesław Goliszewski (1979) and Bogdan Lewandowski (1981). An interesting publication in this context is Panorama dywersji (1985), published by Interpress and containing discussions about the radio programs broadcast by the Voice of America. However, there is no information about the author of the Introduction or the selection of analyzed programs.

There was only one translation of an American publication in the period discussed: Sternicy świadomości by Schiller (1976), chosen because it was extremely critical of the American media market and therefore fit into the narrative of socialist states. Translations of the Soviet authors were much more numerous, e.g. Georgy Arbatov (1972), Boris Bessonow (1976) and Rudolf Borecki (1987). Of course, ideological issues were of great importance in these studies, yet Arbatov and especially Borecki made their own contribution to research on propaganda, including its visual aspect.

Concluding the topic of studies on propaganda, including its visual side in this period, it is necessary to mention an interesting publication authored by Krzysztof Pol (1980). It contains a unique selection of reproductions of Polish propaganda posters from the collections of the Museum of the History of the Polish Revolutionary Movement and the Polish Army Museum in Warsaw. In addition to the reproductions of posters, the author describes the activity of the Propaganda Posters Studio of the Propaganda Department of the Main Political and Education Board of the Polish Army, presents profiles of poster creators and discusses technical issues related to their reproduction and distribution. Somewhat similar is a publication devoted to war photography authored by Henryk Latos (1985). Although the topic of the propaganda use of photography is not primary aim of the study, it is still mentioned in the book, whose additional advantage is a very broad chronological range of the analyzed photographs, covering the years 1839–1980.

To summarize the 50 years of research on propaganda in Poland during the communist period, it can be stated that the publications appearing on the market represented two basic types. Some of
the studies dealt with theoretical issues, compared the propaganda activities of the ‘imperialistic West’ and the ‘democratic East’ and analyzed the organizational activity of the propaganda apparatus. The remaining publications were a kind of reflection on specific areas of propaganda activity related to painting, sculpture or architecture.

2.3. Years 1990–2022

Before we move on to a broader discussion of the studies on propaganda by Polish researchers published in Poland after 1989, there is one reservation that needs to be made. The presented publications have been selected from many more available because the article is not intended as a systematic review of the literature, but merely to present the most important trends and topics of research on propaganda and its visual side. Therefore, there is no room here for some important publications on the language of propaganda, including contemporary one, which fall outside the scope defined above (e.g. Borkowski, 2003; Bralczyk, 2001, 2007; Głowiński, 1991, 1999, 2016; Kamińska-Szmaj, 1994, 2001; Kłosińska & Rusinek 2019). Similarly, only selected books published by the Institute of National Remembrance will be mentioned whereas works on disinformation and the fake news phenomenon, whose specificity goes beyond the scope

Figs. 5, 6, 7, 8. Proposals for colorful boards and installation designs.
of this article, will be entirely omitted. The most important scientific articles on propaganda, including its visual aspects, will also be discussed only symbolically, because so many of them have been written in the last 30 years that mentioning them all in this text would destroy its intended structure. Translations of publications written in other languages will also be omitted because while translations into Polish during the communist period showed a certain ideological dependence in research on propaganda, after 1989 translations of foreign and especially English-language literature should simply be considered a norm.

A kind of bridge between publications from the times of the communist system and the new reality of the Third Polish Republic is provided by a book by Jerzy Sztumski Propaganda – jej problemy i metody. As suggested by the mention of problems and methods in the subtitle, it is a coursebook for students of political sciences and journalism, which discusses various issues related to the concept of propaganda, its ways of influencing, the effectiveness of propaganda activities and even visual propaganda, to which a subchapter is devoted. The graphic form of the study is interesting because apart from the professionally composed table of content, the entire volume is written on a typewriter, i.e. in the form typical of communist era instruction and training materials, despite being published in 1990.

Moving on to scientific publications on propaganda, we should point out complete studies, comprehensively discussing the theoretical aspects of propaganda. Those particularly noteworthy are: Teoria i praktyka propagandy by three distinguished researchers from the University of Wrocław (Dobek-Ostrowska, Fras, & Ociepka, 1999), Propaganda współczesna (2005) by Henryk Kula and the work by Michał Gajlewicz Techniki perswazyjne. Podstawy (2009). The last of these publications is especially relevant because the author collected a huge amount of graphic materials (photos of advertisements, billboards and charts) and used them to demonstrate the persuasive power of visual materials. Also collective works occupy an importance place in the literature. Among many such publications those noteworthy are: Propaganda w systemach demokratycznych i niedemokratycznych (2015), Przekonać, pozyskać, skłonić. Re-wizje (2020), Oblicza propagandy (2002) and an extremely useful book from the point of view of the methodology of examining visual materials Komunikacja wizualna (2012), edited by recently deceased Piotr Francuz.

Visuality in propaganda messages was and still is analyzed by Urszula Jarecka, who is the author of two very good publications devoted to images of war in the media: Propaganda słuszonej wojny (2008) and Nikczemny wojownik na słuszonej wojnie (2008). Research on the visual side of propaganda is also conducted by the Institute of Sociology of the University of Łódź, resulting in two collective works: Socjologia wizualna w praktyce (2011) and Wojna, obraz, propaganda (2014), as well as a series of articles on grounded theory and its application in the study of visual materials (Konecki, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2012).

Many publications that appeared during the period in question analyzed propaganda activities in various historical periods. As regards works referring to the interwar period (mainly the Polish-Bolshevik war), it is worth mentioning two extremely cognitively valuable works by Aleksandra L. Leinwand: Sztuka w służbie utopii (1998) and Czerwonym młotem w orle białego (2008). Other publications regarding propaganda activities from this period include Raporty i informacje Biura Propagandy... (2002) and Polacy i Rosjanie we wzajemnej karykатурze (2008). Another book referring to visual aspects of propaganda is a monograph by Marcin Krzanicki Fotografia i propaganda (2013), which describes the role of press photojournalism in the interwar period.

The period of World War II and propaganda activities of the Third Reich was reflected in two fundamental works by Eugeniusz C. Król: Propaganda i indoktrynacja narodowego socjalizmu
Publications showing the construction of messages in totalitarian regimes are represented by studies on the instrumental use of art (painting, film, theater and sculpture) in Nazi propaganda. Particularly noteworthy are the monographs by Piotr Krakowski *Sztuka Trzeciej Rzeszy* (1994) and Bogusław Drewniak *Teatr i film Trzeciej Rzeszy* (2011). The visual aspect refers also to the cinema. An important publication in this area is a monograph *Kinematograf kontrowelowany* (2006), which analyzes the development of censorship, its impact on the cinema and generally the film industry in the United States and the Polish People’s Republic. Cinematography is also the topic of publications by Dorota J. Wędrowska (2016) and Mieczysław B.B. Biskupski (2011).

Other studies in this field include works by Igor Witkowski (2001, 2008, 2010), which have lower scientific value but present extensive iconographic material. If we look at the issues of visuality a little more broadly, without omitting the role of architecture in propaganda, we should also note the publications authored by Janusz L. Dobesz, (1999) and Marek Żyromski (2015) as well as the collective work titled *Klopotliwe dziedzictwo? Architektura Trzeciej Rzeszy w Polsce* (2020). Finally, we should mention a very extensive monograph by Tadeusz P. Rutkowski (2020), which presents the image of Poland and Poles in the Soviet propaganda, culture and historiography.

Publications devoted to propaganda of the broadly defined Polish People’s Republic can be categorized as follows: 1) history and organization of the propaganda apparatus, 2) socialist realism – art and architecture in the service of propaganda, and 3) case studies – institutions and people engaged in propaganda activities.


The second group consists of publications devoted to the visual side of propaganda, i.e. the use of artistic works including socialist realism and architecture in propaganda activity. Here the most noteworthy are two monumental studies on socialist realism: *Realizm socjalistyczny w Polsce z perspektywy 50 lat* (2001) and *Soorealizm w malarstwie polskim* (2014). Especially the latter publication contains a lot of previously unpublished iconographic materials. Another interesting example is a biographic work on Mieczysław Berman, one of the most famous graphic artists of the communist era (2017). Other publications worth noting include: *Realizm socjalistyczny...* (2001), *Inżyniera dusz...* (1999), *Jaką pleć ma robotnica. Analiza symboli realizmu socjalistycznego* (2018), and *Tyńc szkół na tysiąclecie* (2018).

The third group – case studies – offers a quite detailed analysis of the activity of the propaganda apparatus in various areas of state functioning. Particularly noteworthy are studies by Piotr Ośka (2010), Jarosław Wtorkiewicz (2002) and Mariusz Mazur (2003). Monographs and studies were also written about institutions, including the Polish Film Chronicle (2006), the Polish Press Agency (2007) and the martial law press (2012).
As regards publications on contemporary propaganda in Poland, there are definitely fewer of them. An interesting work of this period is a book by bishop Adam Leps Świat propagandy (2006). It is a small volume describing not only the techniques and means of propaganda, but also mechanisms intended to protect readers against the harmful effects of propaganda messages. Other noteworthy publications in this groups are case studies, especially in view of the situation beyond Poland’s eastern border – those devoted to Russian propaganda. The works that should be mentioned in this context include: Kultowa propaganda (2017), Operacja Ukraina (2020) and Granica propagandy (2022), describing and analyzing propaganda messages created in the Russian Federation and Belarus and addressed both to their own citizens (internal propaganda) and external recipients. Another type of publications that falls into the category of case studies are analyses of media messages in which attention is drawn to their alleged manipulative nature. These are not scientific studies but they are worth noting nevertheless, for instance, Metody manipulacji XXI wieku (2013) and Propaganda. Współczesne oblicza (2011). A slightly different publication that still belongs to this category is a book by journalist Mariusz Kowalewski (2019), who showed, as if were “from the inside” the functioning of the state-owned Polish Television, especially in the area of creating propaganda messages and the related personnel policy of the broadcaster.

From the perspective of studies devoted to visual messages, it is worth mentioning a publication by Zofia Smelka-Leszczynska (2020) on Polish election posters, which is rich in illustrative material. Since election posters are both agitational and persuasive in nature, their analysis belongs with other publications on propaganda messages.

Finally, we should mention the catalogs of museum collections and exhibitions collection that were devoted, at least partly to graphic materials of a propaganda nature. These include: Zwycięstwo pod Warszawą (2005) and 17 września (2006), both published by the Karta Center, as well as Polska i sowiecka propaganda w wojnie polsko-bolszewickiej 1919–1921 (2010), Rok 1920. Plakaty ze zbiorów Centralnej Biblioteki Wojskowej im. Marszałka Józefa Piłsudskiego (2011), and Katalog zbiorów sztuki współczesnej Muzeum Zamoyskich w Kozłówce, vol. 1 Malarstwo, Rysunek, Grafika (2016).

Summarizing the research on propaganda in Poland after 1989, it can be said that the publications appearing on the market were of dual nature. Some studies dealt with theoretical issues, however their authors relied largely on the Western literature of the subject and did not offer a comprehensive position on the theory of propaganda that would be created from scratch and set in Polish realities. More numerous were case studies (the third group of publications), representing a kind of reflection on specific areas of propaganda activity related to painting, sculpture and architecture.

3. New phenomena and research trends
A review of publications on the phenomenon of propaganda in general and visual propaganda in particular allows us to conclude that scientific studies on this topic are unable to keep up with the rapidly changing reality, especially in the part related to new technologies. Our conceptual apparatus is not really up-to-date and as a result, some new phenomena completely escape us.

When it comes to new phenomena related to propaganda which have appeared in the Polish literature of the subject in recent years, we should mention participatory propaganda and computational propaganda, including the use of deep fakes. Studies on these phenomena are scattered and generally not included among the most cited books on propaganda. As of January 2023, the first of these, participatory propaganda, has not been described in the Polish literature at all. It is, however, not a very important phenomenon because it refers to the changing para-
Propaganda in Polish media studies: Visual aspect

Łukasz Szurmiński • Propaganda in Polish media studies: Visual aspect

The traditional division of roles between the propagandist and the audience to whom the message is addressed has become blurred because audiences themselves participate in the distribution of propaganda content, and what is even more important, the content they spread may be even more credible to other recipients due to their personal connections. Taking this into account, the two authors mentioned above proposed a modified version of the definition of propaganda originally presented by the previously Jowett and O’Donnell (2006), which reads as follows:

“Participatory propaganda is the deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior of a target audience while seeking to co-opt its members to actively engage in the spread of persuasive communications, to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist” (Wanles & Berk, 2021, p. 113).

As regards computational propaganda, publications on this topic are limited to a few items and began to appear in 2019. Particularly noteworthy are articles by Mateusz Bartoszewicz (2019) and Agnieszka Demczuk (2022) as well as book chapters by Grzegorz Ptaszek (2019) and Jerzy Jastrzębski (2020). Both Bartoszewicz (p. 95) and Ptaszek (p. 224) quote in their texts a definition by Samuel Woolley and Philip Howard, according to which computational propaganda is: “the assemblage of social media platforms, autonomous agents and big data tasked with the manipulation of public opinion” (Woolley & Howard, 2016, p. 4486).

In the context of new possibilities for researching propaganda, the use of biometric methods merits attention, as pointed by the co-editor of this volume Alicja Waszkiewicz-Raviv (2019). A research project using biometric tools was also conducted by the author of this article (Szurmiński & Kisilowska, 2019). The near future will likely see studies on the use of big data sets as source material and the related analysis methodology in Polish research on propaganda. A well-known example of conducting activities based on such resources is the case of Cambridge Analytica, while examples of foreign research projects were discussed for instance by Gillian Bolsover and Philip Howard (2017).

Summary: Propaganda and social communication and media sciences

The broad cross-section of the literature presented above allows us to conclude that research on propaganda is interdisciplinary and conducted by representatives of several scientific disciplines. The most widely represented fields are media studies, political science and history. Taking into account both the authors’ affiliations and the places of publication (i.e. periodicals assigned to specific sciences) it must be stated that research on propaganda is one of the areas of inquiry of social communication and media studies. However, the involvement of political scientists and historians constitutes an additional value in the development of knowledge about past and current mechanisms of propaganda activities.

The intensive use of visual media, not only in propaganda but generally in political communication, clearly indicates that research devoted to them will be gaining more and more importance. The problem from the researcher’s point of view is the ephemerality of some visual media (e.g. memes) and, at the same time, the exponentially growing number of versions repeated in different variants of visual messages. This forces researchers dealing with this area of communication to be constantly attentive and observe the dynamics of media development. There is no doubt that after the period of ideological involvement of some researchers during the communist period, contemporary research on visual messages in propaganda constitutes an important part of the discipline of social communication and media studies.
Bibliography


Łukasz Szurmiński • Propaganda in Polish media studies: Visual aspect


Polska i sowiecka propaganda w wojnie polsko-bolszewickiej 1919–1921. Łódź: Muzeum Tradycji Niepodległościowej.


Łukasz Szurmiński • Propaganda in Polish media studies: Visual aspect


