

A PRACTICAL OVERVIEW OF THE ROLE OF MUSIC IN THE PROPAGANDA OF DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

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Summary

The article examines the practical role of music in the propaganda systems of various countries. The aim of the study is to demonstrate how music has been used in propaganda practices across different nations. To achieve this goal, the information was analyzed, compared, and summarized through the use of methods such as comparison, classification, and generalization, which made it possible to clearly outline the role of music in the propaganda structures of different countries during the 20th and 21st centuries. The findings indicate that propaganda is a targeted process of communicative influence. It became especially widespread in the 20th and 21st centuries, particularly during World War II. Various propaganda tools are used, yet music holds a special place as it combines emotional, psychological, and cognitive influence. The study demonstrates that music serves not only an aesthetic but also a social and communicative function. It has been established that, in a political context, music can reflect and shape the spirit of an era, strengthening the sense of unity around particular ideas or a leader. Examples from different countries show that music is actively used in election campaigns, rallies, revolutionary movements, and even in modern political advertising. In particular, in the United Kingdom and the United States, special “anthems of unity” are created to evoke in voters a sense of trust, patriotism, and nostalgia. During World War II, music was mainly employed to maintain soldiers’ morale, foster a sense of unity, and inspire the desire to fight for certain ideals. The practical value of this study lies in rethinking the understanding of the role of music in the propaganda system through a historical approach. This is of great importance for politicians and diplomats who aim to develop and influence the population or specific social groups.

Key words: music, propaganda, history, communication.

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1. Introduction

Propaganda is a subtle science that requires the involvement of experienced and talented professionals in various fields – political, psychological, artistic, and communicative. It is mainly directed not only at human consciousness but primarily at the subconscious – through emotional state, system of beliefs, and the formation of behavioral patterns. One of the strongest means of such influence is music, since its effect begins with creating a certain mood, gradually moving into the realm of thinking and worldview perception. Properly chosen music can unite people around any idea – political, social, or cultural.

That is why propaganda is used as a tool for shaping collective consciousness, reinforcing ideological messages, and creating the necessary emotional background. It is important to note that the mentioned examples of the use of music in different countries are neither a new discovery nor a hidden secret. These are natural processes that accompany the history of humankind and demonstrate how deeply music can integrate into the mechanisms of

propaganda. Understanding such processes has practical significance, as it helps to realize how exactly music can be used for social, political, and ideological purposes. The practical value of this research lies in analyzing specific historical examples that demonstrate the role of music as an instrument of propaganda in different countries of the world.

2. Review of literature

The practical use of music as a propaganda tool has been widely studied in academic literature, with many works examining its impact across different nations. On a micro level, the mechanisms of influence are outlined in the works of Arjmand, Hohagen, Paton, and Rickard (2017) and Juslin and Västfjäll (2008), who show that music can shape emotions through neuropsychological and cognitive pathways. In turn, Schäfer, Sedlmeier, Städtler, and Huron (2013) demonstrate that music performs multiple functions – from mood regulation to social identification. When considering its use on a state level, Lasswell (1927) examines music as a cultural instrument in wartime conditions. Researchers Jowett and O'Donnell (2019), as well as Sproule (2023), specify the criteria distinguishing persuasion from propaganda in the media sphere. In a comparative-historical context, the studies of Cathcart (n.d.) and Howerton (2023) are valuable, as they reveal the influence of music in Germany during World War II. The American experience is reflected in the work of Gordeeva (2021), who analyzed the mobilization and patriotic aspects of wartime music. The influence of music on Chinese propaganda is explored by Lau (2008) and Ouyang (2022), who examine the creation of “revolutionary songs” and their impact on mass consciousness. Researcher Heo (2018) describes the North Korean model of musical propaganda, in which ritual songs serve to reproduce ideological loyalty. Special attention is given to the Soviet context, analyzed by Liao (2024), who explored the works of D. Shostakovich and S. Prokofiev as examples of the synthesis between art and ideological agendas. Modern aspects of music use under digitalization are represented in the works of Behr (2022) and Michel (2018), showing how music in new media functions as a means of micro-targeted influence and an element of political branding. Therefore, the significance of this study is multifaceted, as it systematizes material for a comprehensive presentation of the research subject. To achieve the stated goal, information was analyzed, compared, and summarized using the methods of comparison, classification, and generalization, which made it possible to clearly define the role of music in the propaganda structures of different countries.

The aim of the study is to demonstrate the practical experience of using music in propaganda across various countries. It is necessary to complete the following tasks in order to achieve this goal in the study: define the essence of propaganda and its instruments; identify the psychological aspects of musical influence; and determine how music has been used in propaganda across different nations.

3. Methodology

Methodological basis of the study: the research relies on systemic and comparative-historical approaches. The information was analyzed, compared, and summarized to identify patterns in the use of music in the propaganda of different countries; in particular, the methods of analysis, synthesis, comparison, classification, and generalization are applied. These methods made it possible to distinguish key features of propaganda influence and determine the role of music within the structure of political communication. The study is based on an interdisciplinary approach that combines elements of social psychology, cultural studies, musicology, and

political science; the source base includes works by foreign scholars, analytical materials, and historical documents.

4. Results

Propaganda is a targeted process of communicative influence. Its primary aim is to shape the beliefs and attitudes of mass audiences. The essence of propaganda lies in the dissemination of specific ideas, images, and narratives intended to achieve various objectives, including political, military, or social ones. In his research, Lasswell (1927) defined propaganda as the management of collective attitudes through manipulation. Accordingly, propaganda is not only an informational but also a psychological tool. It enables the rise of certain political structures to power, the mobilization of populations, or the neutralization of opposing views. Modern studies show that propaganda functions are far-reaching. They allow for the integration of specific ideas, the mobilization of society, the justification of certain events or figures, and even the facilitation of repressive actions (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2019). In the 20th and 21st centuries, propaganda was actively employed in various political campaigns, particularly during wars and the events leading up to them. Classic examples include information campaigns of World War II, the anti-communist campaigns of the Cold War era, and contemporary digital propaganda, which uses social media, audiovisual content, and musical products that strongly affect public consciousness.

Music, as emphasized by numerous studies, is one of the most expressive means of emotional influence. The tools and techniques of propaganda are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Tools and techniques of propaganda

№	Instrument / Technique	Description	Purpose of influence
1	Mass media (press, radio, television)	Dissemination of messages to a wide audience through controlled channels.	Shaping public opinion, supporting the political agenda.
2	Visual symbols and posters	Use of images, colors, and heroes to create emotional associations.	Strengthening identity, national unity, or fear of the "other."
3	Language and rhetoric	Manipulation of terms, euphemisms, and repetitive messages.	Normalization of ideological concepts, reduction of critical thinking.
4	Cinema and visual narratives	Creation of mythologized images through films, series, and videos.	Emotional identification with ideological heroes or behavioral models.
5	Music	Use of melodies, rhythm, and song lyrics to form shared feelings and evoke patriotic or aggressive emotions.	Subconscious emotional engagement, legitimization of ideas through aesthetic form.
6	Advertising and PR	Integration of commercial and political messages into the cultural space.	Supporting image formation, building trust in the information source.
7	Social networks and digital algorithms	Use of targeting, bots, and viral content.	Reinforcing repetition effects and maintaining control over the information environment.

Note: compiled based on Jowett and O'Donnell (2019); Lasswell (1927); and Sproule (2023).

As an important propaganda tool, music has a long history. Documented examples of its systematic use date back to the 20th century, starting from the 1930s to the present day. It was during this period that governments seeking to control public consciousness realized the immense potential of music as a means of emotional and psychological influence. Music began not only to accompany political events but also to shape ideological content, creating a sense of collective unity.

A key example is Nazi Germany between 1933 and 1945, when music was placed under state control. In 1933, within the structure of the Ministry of Propaganda under J. Goebbels, the “Reichsmusikkammer” the Imperial Music Chamber was established. Its main task was to determine which music could be listened to, which was forbidden, and which should be used for various events. Another function of this organization was to remove the works of Jewish composers, including jazz and modernist experiments, which were declared a threat to the “Aryan spirit.” Instead, patriotic marches, choral works, and party anthems were promoted.

One of the most significant pieces of that period was the anthem Horst-Wessel-Lied, which became a symbol of the Nazi movement and an obligatory element of political rallies. Through mass singing, particularly in the Hitlerjugend, music became a tool for fostering unity, sacrifice, and hatred toward the enemy (*Howerton, 2023*).

Meanwhile, in the Soviet Union, a similar system of musical propaganda was established during the same period, with the main goal of maintaining ideological control within the aesthetics of socialist realism. Music was expected to “reflect reality in its revolutionary development,” glorifying labor, the people, and the Party. Composers such as D. Shostakovich and S. Prokofiev created works commissioned by the government that aligned with official doctrine.

For instance, Shostakovich’s Symphony No. 7, written in 1941, was performed during the Siege of Leningrad and became a symbol of Soviet resistance. Prokofiev’s scores for the films *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) and *Ivan the Terrible* (1944–1945) created heroic imagery that served to legitimize Soviet patriotism. Thus, music contributed to constructing the image of a strong, united nation capable of overcoming any enemy (*Liao, 2024*).

Similar processes occurred in the United States during World War II, where music became a means of patriotic mobilization and psychological support. Songs and concerts were organized for soldiers, featuring popular entertainers both on the front and at home. These performances had a dual purpose: entertainment and morale boosting. Jazz orchestras and famous singers were especially popular, performing pieces that encouraged unity and support for the troops. The American entertainment industry actively produced musical films and propaganda radio programs. During this period, music became part of democratic propaganda, shaping a positive narrative of the war for freedom and justice (*Gordeeva, 2021*).

In China, active propaganda through music was observed between 1966 and 1976. Under Mao Zedong’s leadership, a canon of “red songs” was developed – revolutionary compositions performed by millions across the country. Songs such as *Dongfang hong* (The East Is Red) glorified the leader and communist ideology. The dominance of these songs displaced other musical forms. “Model works” – yangbanxi, musical-dramatic performances with explicit political messages – were created to serve as musical equivalents of party slogans, used in mass culture to foster loyalty to the regime. During this period, music ceased to be merely an art form and became a full-fledged instrument of collective ritual that disciplined citizens’ emotions and thinking (*Lau, 2008*).

In North Korea, beginning in the 1950s, music also became a core component of ideology. The Juche system combined political self-sufficiency with the cult of leadership. Mass choirs, orchestras, and military ensembles performed hymns dedicated to Kim Il Sung,

Kim Jong Il, and Kim Jong Un. Songs such as The Song of General Kim Il Sung and We Have Nothing to Envy were performed at all national celebrations and broadcast daily. Their rhythm, melody, and lyrics were designed to maintain emotional unity, pride, and loyalty to the regime. In the DPRK, music not only accompanies political ideology – it effectively replaces it, serving as the foundation of political culture and a means of emotionally legitimizing power (Heo, 2018).

Table 2

Practical use of music as a propaganda instrument in different countries

Country / Regime	Period	Key mechanisms	Specific examples of application
Nazi Germany	1933–1945	Centralized control (<i>Reichsmusikkammer</i>), labeling of “degenerate” music, party anthems, mass radio broadcasting, indoctrination of youth through singing	<i>Entartete Musik</i> Exhibition (1938); party anthem <i>Horst-Wessel-Lied</i> ; marching songs of the <i>Hitlerjugend</i> (Cathcart, n.d.; Howerton, 2023)
USSR (socialist realism)	1930s–1950s (+ later)	Canonization of the “correct” patriotic aesthetics, desacralization of “formalism,” symphonic and cinematic patriotism	Shostakovich’s Symphony No. 7; Prokofiev’s scores for <i>Alexander Nevsky</i> and <i>Ivan the Terrible</i> ; a distinct body of patriotic songs and film music (Liao, 2024)
USA (World War II)	1941–1945	Patriotic songs, concerts for troops and the home front, popular music as a means of moral support, media integration	Propaganda films with patriotic soundtracks; public support campaigns; “victory” repertoire (Gordeeva, 2021)
PRC (Cultural Revolution)	1966–1976	Standardization of the “red” canon, mass singing, “model works” (<i>yangbanxi</i>), elimination of “incorrect” styles	Revolutionary songs as daily ritual; theatrical performances with unified rhetoric (Lau, 2008; Ouyang, 2022)
DPRK (Juche)	1950s–present	“Juche realism,” mass choral genres, hymns with cult-like lyrics, strictly directed public performances	“Mass songs” as emotional slogans; musical rituals of loyalty at state events (Heo, 2018)

Thus, from Nazi Germany of the 1930s to North Korea of the 21st century, music has been consistently used as an instrument of propaganda. Regardless of the political system or historical era, it has always served to mobilize, identify, and control the masses, acting as a mediator between authority and the emotions of society.

5. Discussions

According to Jowett and O’Donnell (2019), propaganda becomes effective when it combines multi-channel influence, uses repetitive symbols, and creates an emotional background that facilitates the internal acceptance of specific messages. Modern propaganda theory identifies a broad range of influence methods. Sproule (2023) notes that propaganda not only rationalizes arguments but also sets emotional and aesthetic tones. Since propaganda appeals to emotions, culture, psychological factors, personal experiences, and fears, it employs simple

yet powerful tools – language, sound, and certain rituals. Among its key instruments are mass media, visual symbols, cinema, and music.

As shown in the studies of Lasswell (1927), Jowett and O'Donnell (2019), and Sproule (2023), the key principle of propaganda remains the combination of emotional and cognitive influence. This makes propaganda one of the most effective mechanisms of social control in mass society.

Music is one of the instruments of propaganda because it has a powerful impact on the human psyche. Moreover, it affects cognitive states through emotions. Music not only evokes emotional reactions but also shapes certain attitudes, moods, and behaviors, determining how a person acts in specific cultural, political, or commercial contexts. As noted by Juslin and Västfjäll (2008), the emotional response to music is based on several mechanisms. First are physiological ones – including rhythm perception, arousal, and activation of the autonomic nervous system; second are cognitive – such as associative thinking and social contexts of perception. These mechanisms enhance the messages conveyed by propaganda. They transmit emotional symbols and create a state of collective emotional involvement, making music one of the key instruments of propaganda (Juslin & Västfjäll, 2008).

The psychological functions of listening to music go far beyond aesthetic pleasure. According to Schäfer, Sedlmeier, Städtler, and Huron (2013), music performs several fundamental functions. It regulates emotions; defines social identification; expresses values; and serves as a means of group communication. In the political context, this means that music can not only reflect the spirit of an era but also shape it, creating a sense of unity around a political ideal. Musicians and composers emphasize that creating such music strengthens feelings of independence and loyalty to a particular community, which is actively used in political campaigns at various levels – from ordinary political rallies to revolutionary movements.

The physiological effects of music are directly linked to the psychodynamic state of a person. According to researchers Arjmand, Hohagen, Paton, and Rickard (2017), listening to music changes the balance of activity between the brain hemispheres. This can alter frontal asymmetry, that is, the ratio between positive and negative responses. Such changes manifest as increased motivation, optimism, or aggressiveness depending on the character of the music.

In the political context, this mechanism is used to create the necessary emotional tone of events. For example, during election rallies, background music serves as a catalyst for emotional tension and helps enhance enthusiasm and solidarity (Arjmand et al., 2017).

In modern politics, music functions not only as an element of emotional resonance but also as part of digital culture in election campaigns. In his research, Behr (2022) shows that in the digital age, music is integrated into democratic election processes primarily through social media. Musical accompaniment for political videos often gains popularity on youth-oriented platforms such as TikTok. The use of music on YouTube serves as a marker of political identity and a tool for shaping a candidate's image (Zhyvko & Petrukha, 2023).

Examples include the United Kingdom and the United States, where political events often feature or commission unity anthems, and where rock classics are used to subconsciously inspire voter trust, evoke patriotism and nostalgia, and create a positive atmosphere around a political brand (Behr, 2022).

Music is also widely used in advertising, which, in essence, is a form of propaganda. It serves in image-based campaigns that often intersect with the promotion of specific political forces or figures. Michel (2018) demonstrates that the use of popular songs in election campaigning is one of the most effective ways to establish emotional communication with voters. For this reason, political parties compete for musical representatives – stars whose songs can

symbolize a political force. The support of such musicians significantly broadens the audience reach.

However, this practice often raises ethical and legal dilemmas since music carries its own cultural meaning and can be reinterpreted within an ideological context. In such cases, political advertising through music exploits the listener's trust in the performer or genre, using it as a symbolic resource for emotional manipulation (*Michel, 2018*).

6. Conclusions

Propaganda is a purposeful process of communicative influence whose main goal is the formation of certain beliefs, attitudes, and even models of social behavior. It became particularly active in the 20th–21st centuries, especially during the Second World War. The means of art, primarily music, at that time became an integral element of political and social strategies. The propaganda theory of that period covered a wide range of methods of influence – through mass media, visual symbols, language, cinematography, advertising, and social networks. Music occupied a special place because it combined emotional, psychological, and cognitive influence. At first, by affecting a person's mood, it created emotions, and later the generated emotional state contributed to the acceptance of necessary decisions. By its nature, music can unite people around certain ideas, evoke a sense of unity, and at the same time direct emotions toward opposition or hatred of others.

The examples of Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, the USA, China, and North Korea make it possible to see different models of using music as a tool of propaganda. In Germany, it shaped the image of unity through anthems and marches. In the USSR, anthems and marches were also often used, but with the aim of affirming collectivism and the aesthetics of patriotism. In the American context, music did not have a distinct propagandistic character; instead, it was used softly – as a supporting element that created an atmosphere of optimism and solidarity. That is why light musical genres, particularly jazz, became popular, unlike the marches characteristic of Germany and the Soviet Union. The role of music in propaganda can be observed most vividly in North Korea and China, where it serves as a means of glorifying the leader, fostering loyalty, and collective pride.

Thus, summarizing the results of the study, it can be concluded that music is, on the one hand, an artistic phenomenon, and on the other – when used for political purposes – it becomes a powerful mechanism of social influence capable of shaping mass consciousness.

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