

**Propaganda analysis and agenda-setting on the websites of the most prominent
Greek football and basketball teams**

Michalis Tastsoglou

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
Department of Communication and Media Studies

Correspondence with:

Michalis Tastsoglou

tastsog@media.uoa.gr

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
Department of Communication and Media Studies
1 Sofokleous str., Athens, 10559

International Journal of Sport Management Recreation & Tourism, Vol.29b, p.23-42, 2025

© 2016-2025 I.J.S.Ma.R.T. All rights reserved. ISSN: 1791-874X

Propaganda analysis and agenda-setting on the websites of the most prominent Greek football and basketball teams

Abstract

The objective of the present study is to examine the propaganda techniques employed in the realm of sports communication, with a particular focus on the announcements published on the official websites of the prevailing Greek football and basketball clubs. Consequently, a content analysis will be conducted on the websites of the five foremost Greek football clubs (Olympiacos, Panathinaikos, AEK, PAOK, Aris) and the two corresponding leaders in basketball (Panathinaikos, Olympiacos). This is a quantitative content analysis of a sample of 350 announcements hosted on the aforementioned websites (the last 50 announcements from each team for 2024). A close examination of the professional sports sector in Greece reveals numerous parallels with the Greek media in terms of its political economy. It is widely accepted that these organisations do not possess any specific commercial interests, as their primary function is to promote and defend the objectives of their owners. The media system in question is referred to as polarised pluralistic. Nevertheless, the main findings of this research reveal that the official websites are used as tools for public relations and white propaganda, presenting low levels of polarization. Conversely, the utilization of evaluative discourse, founded upon commentary, signifies the propagandistic function of these media.

Keywords: Sports Communication, Propaganda, Public Relations, Post-Truth, Sports Journalism

Propaganda analysis and agenda-setting on the websites of the most prominent Greek football and basketball teams

Introduction

Although sports communication has gained prominence in the domain of communication and media studies, some of its aspects continue to be shrouded in obscurity. Football and basketball clubs, in conjunction with their communication offices, typically fulfil three distinct roles in their public relations duties. Firstly, they function as a source for both traditional and new media by providing valuable information to journalists. This is a part of the so-called intra-media communication, while they are in contact with a variety of media outlets, both vertically and horizontally. Secondly, they are responsible for the management of their official social media pages. This is an inter-media function, because the clubs want to take part in the public sphere with their own accounts. It is imperative to note that this second assignment is also necessary for their participation in extra-media communication, as the objective is to gain visibility in content controlled by third-party platforms which provide news according to algorithmically set values. Examples of such platforms include Facebook timeline, Google news, Apple news, etc. Thirdly, the club's official website is managed by the communication office, which is responsible for the publication of original journalistic content, as well as of announcements made by the club, i.e. by the same office. This constitutes an additional facet of their work pertaining to intra-media communication (Kristensen & Bro, 2024).

This research has to do with the third duty, which remains the least studied so far. Its objective is to investigate the propaganda techniques employed in sports communication, with a particular focus on the announcements made by sports clubs. It focuses on three key concepts of communication theory: agenda-setting, propaganda and evaluative discourse. Therefore, it seeks to provide primary data regarding the agenda of these media outlets: what kind of information do they select to publish on their main news page and which of the published issues are the most appearing ones? As far as propaganda is concerned, this study theorizes propaganda as a neutral tool for public communication whose intentions are heavily based on the purpose and the objectives of the propagandist behind it. Consequently, this quantitative research study investigates the use of propaganda techniques, as well as the color of the propaganda published on the official websites of the leading Greek clubs. The third concept, evaluative discourse

based on commentary, is examined here because it is related to the interpretation of reality. The process of interpreting reality shapes a discourse with implications in propaganda and public relations. These two fields of study have been observed to struggle for conceptualizing and imposing the meanings they prefer (Bernays, 1928; Fiske, 1989).

Review of Literature

Conceptualizing propaganda

Propaganda is a concept of communication that has acquired negative use in public discourse (Lilleker, 2006: 163; Shabo, 2008: 93). This is due to the negative connotations it acquired after the two World Wars, during which it took on an almost uncontrolled magnitude. But in what war is the truth not the first casualty? During the inter-war period, Bernays, the father of spin and the main proponent of "counsel on public relations" (Bernays, 1923: 1), included propaganda in a legitimate process of attracting public interest (Bernays, 1928). On the contrary, after the Second World War, propaganda became embedded in people's minds as something negative. A typical example is Ellul's (1968) definition of it as a means of subconscious manipulation of the masses.

Yet, even in the field of public relations, which now has more than a negative connotation, the concept of manipulation has been dominant since their infancy. Pioneers like Lee and Bernays were the ones who changed the fortunes of public relations in a more positive direction (Tye, 1998; Morris & Goldsworthy, 2021). If we go back to the years before the Second World War, we observe that almost every state had official propaganda services. Characteristically, the Nazis had a Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda (Hilmes, 2013: 208), the British had already established a Ministry of Information since the First World War, while in 1914 they also created Wellington House (Bennett, 2020: 249), the secret war propaganda office, and the Soviets, on the other hand, had an agitprop department within the CPSU, while in 1947 they created Cominform (Taylor, 2003: 255) to strategically coordinate communication between the communist parties. Thus, we cannot say that propaganda was something negative, as there were official services involved in it.

One definition that may assist in comprehending the true function of propaganda is that proposed by Lilleker (2006: 162), who delineates propaganda as "communication that is deliberately designed by one group in society to influence the attitudes and behaviour of others". This particular definition also allows for the presence of

propaganda in a positive sense (Shabo, 2008: 93). In order to illustrate this argument, consideration is given to the cases of vaccination for the SARS-CoV-2 and of the use of seat belts when driving. In both cases, there were groups of professionals around the world who designed communication strategies with the aim of encouraging citizens to adopt the required behaviours. The adoption of these behaviours has been demonstrated to be an effective strategy for the preservation of human life. This standpoint suggests that propaganda can also serve a positive function. The concept of propaganda is not per se negative; its application by propagandists is that which determines if it is good or evil.

A useful categorization of propaganda is its division into colors (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2006: 17). In summary, the color of propaganda is determined by two plus two variables. Firstly, it is necessary to ascertain whether the purpose of the propaganda that has been stated is congruent with its actual purpose. Secondly, it should be determined whether the individual or entity that is sponsoring this strategic communication is disclosed. At a subsequent level, however, two principal variables emerge: the quality of the purpose (good or bad propaganda) and the validity of the information it contains. Propaganda is thus distinguished into three categories: white, gray and black. The veracity of the stated purposes and sponsors is indisputable in white. Conversely, a lack of clarity in grey hinders the ability to ascertain the events in question, and in black, the distortion of the information is evident.

With regard to the phenomenon of white propaganda, advertising represents a typical case example. A similar rationale could be applied to public relations, although the extant literature on the relationship between propaganda and public relations is divided (L'Etang, 2008: 253). However, it is challenging to refute the assertion that both propaganda and public relations seek to foster consent (Alvanos, 2008: 48; Taylor, 2003: 6). In this study, the color of propaganda is employed as an independent variable to address all three research questions.

Propaganda techniques employed

In this research, propaganda is also studied based on another variable, which functions as a dependent one. This variable is propaganda techniques. These rhetorical practices are indicative manifestations of propaganda. The range of propaganda techniques is extensive. Consequently, not all techniques could be studied in this research. In light of the foregoing, the decision was taken to commence the analysis with a review of the classic techniques of the Institute of Propaganda Analysis (1939), which

have the most extensive history of implementation within relevant literature (Poulakidakos, 2014; Shabo, 2008; Chatzikonstantinou & Tastsoglou, 2023). Moreover, the categorization of propaganda techniques in this research includes two additional elements. Secondly, a consideration of less sophisticated propaganda techniques is warranted. These techniques are not overly complex, either in terms of rhetorical figures or logical processes. Thirdly, the research could not omit reference to the construction of an enemy, another classic propaganda technique. The use of this technique is common in conditions of increased polarization.

The IPA (1939) outlined seven techniques for the study of propaganda. *Card-stacking* is indicative of selective information processing, whereby certain information is accentuated while others are marginalised (Shabo, 2008: 24). This practice enables the control of what is (not) used from the totality of the circumstances of an event and uses half-truths. The *plain folks* technique is predicated on the premise that a person is an ordinary, everyday person attempting to establish a direct connection with others. The employment of *glittering generalities* constitutes the reference to concepts with a purportedly positive content, thus presenting subjects or objects to which propaganda is addressed as being associated with a specified set of values. *Name-calling* is employed to denote the practice of employing derogatory monikers in lieu of the subject's/object's actual appellation, thereby engendering a state of disfavor or disrepute within the context of the propagandist's narrative and with the scope of defamation. It is used "to disparage an enemy or an opposing view" (Shabo, 2008: 46). *Bandwagon* is a technique in which individuals seek to align themselves with the prevailing sentiments of the masses, often guided by the prevailing public opinion or common sense. This phenomenon can be attributed to the psychological inclination of individuals to identify with the majority, as it fosters a sense of psychological comfort and belonging (Shabo, 2008: 18). The second-to-last technique is that of *testimonials*, which demonstrate the tendency of propaganda to present the words of an authoritative figure and to associate them with the subject or object to which the propaganda is oriented. Finally, *transfer* aims to utilize other persons, concepts or objects with a clear positive sign in public opinion in order to add value to the one for whose needs the propaganda takes place (Chatzikonstantinou & Tastsoglou, 2023: 1200; Poulakidakos, 2014).

The values of the variable for propaganda techniques also include simpler techniques, but these are grouped together as one value, called other techniques. These techniques include some well-known rhetorical practices such as simplification,

exaggeration, distortion, unanimity, connection with the people, euphemism, defamation and assertions.

The construction of the enemy is one of the five basic filters through which consent is secured in the Western world (Herman & Chomsky, 1988: 34). In the case of Herman and Chomsky, of course, the supreme enemy is anti-communism. This refers to the era immediately preceding the termination of the Cold War. Shabo (2008: 52) presents the construction of the enemy as a propaganda technique under the name *pinpointing the enemy*. In contemporary contexts, the nature of enemies varies from case to case. However, this does not negate the continued potency of anti-communism (Chatzikonstantinou & Tastsoglou, 2023: 1203). The concept of scapegoating, a term derived from the construction of the enemy, can be traced back to biblical origins. It is defined as "a social mechanism including its linguistic construction as an archetypal narrative" (Viertmann, 2018: 263). Shabo (2008: 52), in the context of pinpointing the enemy technique, defines scapegoating as "when the enemy in question is blamed for problems that are actually someone else's fault".

Agenda-setting theory and the official websites

Agenda-setting theory posits a correlation between the news selection by the media and the importance that is attributed to these issues by the public (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007: 11). Thus, it is assumed that agenda-setting theory fall into this study, provided that the latter aims to ascertain the issues that are prioritised in the news on the official websites of the most prominent Greek sports clubs. The official websites mediate between the clubs and their fans; it appears imperative to comprehend the mechanisms by which the agenda of official websites is established, particularly given the recognition that the news menu constitutes a product of journalistic work.

Regarding the same theory, the present study utilizes this theoretical framework to identify and document the most fundamental categories of issues. We refer to the following four categories that are used in this research. We divided the posts on the news section of the official websites into political, economic, social and cultural topics. These categories are not mutually exclusive, as long as each topic could even fit into all four categories.

Political issues were defined as those that have more to do with power in the field of sports and institutions such as the Hellenic Football Federation, Hellenic Basketball Federation, UEFA, Euroleague, etc. The economic issues that had to be addressed

included matters pertaining to sponsors, ticket sales, and competitions. Social issues were considered to be those that concerned people with special skills, as well as the established visits by club athletes to social institutions. Finally, it can be posited that all news on the websites could be considered cultural, given their association with sports. The issues that were not registered as cultural were those that had no relation to the match itself, that is to say, with what occurs within the four lines of the field, or with the ritual of training and interviews before and after games, which has a clear cultural value. However, given the inherent cultural nature of sports, a fifth category was incorporated into the typology to encompass issues that are predominantly sports-related. The category encompassed cultural subjects associated with the matches, including match commentary, reports on the match, and interviews with athletes and coaches. When a post was set as a mainly sports issue, it was also considered as a cultural issue.

In this study, the agenda-setting theory is covered in a relatively superficial manner, as the primary objective is not to reveal specific issues that have been extensively covered by official websites. In contrast, the present study's sample consists of news items taken from a neutral period of the season, during which all of the teams were able to pursue their goals. The study's objective is rather to record the types of issues reproduced by the official websites.

Commentary: Between opinion and propaganda

According to Sheafer (2007: 33), "the evaluative tone, or affective attributes (negative or positive)" are obvious "in all stages of the agenda setting/priming process". Commentary is inherent to journalistic discourse. A form of journalistic discourse is the commentarial discourse (Gialabouki, 2008). Commentary is defined as an interpretation of reality and is considered a fundamental subfield of journalistic discourse. In this study, commentarial discourse is conceptualized primarily through three theories.

Firstly, the work of Hallin and Mancini (2004) is relevant in this context. The authors divide the media systems of the Western world into three categories, and it is in this framework that they refer to the commentary discourse as one of the main practices observed in the polarized pluralist system, which prevails in Mediterranean Europe, and therefore in Greece. The system is distinguished by its emphasis on advocacy reporting and its focus on commenting on events from an overtly political perspective. Consequently, the commentary in journalistic discourse could be said to facilitate the interpretation of reality in a manner that aligns with the interests of the media owners.

Secondly, Kovach and Rosenstiel's (2001) seminal work documented the tendency of commentary to displace purely news report discourse from news content. It can thus be posited that contemporary media channels demonstrate a greater propensity to prioritise the interpretation of events as opposed to the provision of a purely accurate depiction of reality. This element is expected to be even more prevalent on the official websites of sports clubs, as these websites are primarily intended for their supporters and are influenced by the polarization that typically exists among the fans of those teams.

Thirdly, Pleios (2001) distinguishes three types of discourse in the media: pragmatic, evaluative and propagandistic. Pragmatic discourse is characterised by an emphasis on the presentation of events. Evaluative discourse is characterised by an attempt to ascribe a desired meaning to events. Propagandistic discourse is a combination of the aforementioned two types, seeking to influence the behaviour of the audience through commentary and persuasion (Ellul, 1968). It can thus be concluded that the employment of commentary on the official websites of sports clubs is associated with propaganda, as it endeavors to evaluate the behaviours of athletes and the club in general, with a view to gaining the sympathy of readers and fans.

In terms of operationalizing the research, commentary is measured in four ways: firstly, whether there is a commentary in the text (yes or no); secondly, whether there is use of evaluative adjectives (yes or no); thirdly, whether metaphors are used (yes or no); and fourthly, to what extent the news item is oriented towards commentary (no, a little or much).

Research questions and methodology

This study aims to answer three research questions. The first one investigates *what are the most common propaganda techniques used in clubs' announcements made by the clubs in their official websites and if there are any differences between football and basketball clubs*. To answer this, the research employs sport and propaganda color as independent variables and the same happens to all of the research questions. Secondly, the research aspires to count *the most dominant types of topics in clubs' announcements*. Thirdly, there is also a research question regarding *whether the announcements are commentary oriented and to what extent*.

The research method is quantitative content analysis. This is a technique for collecting content from the media that is related to media monitoring (Poulakidakos, 2014: 116) and allows us to systematically investigate media content. The unit of

analysis is the news item, i.e. each announcement made in the news section of the official website of the most prominent Greek sports clubs. These are Olympiacos, Panathinaikos, AEK, PAOK and Aris in football and Panathinaikos and Olympiacos in basketball (see Table 1). It must be noted that both Olympiacos and Panathinaikos are owned by different businessmen in football and basketball respectively. The sample consists of 350 units of analysis (250 for football clubs and 100 for basketball), as a result of a purposive sampling. It includes the 50 last announcements made by the clubs in 2024. This period was selected because of its neutrality, while all of the aforementioned clubs were still in the game of pursuing their basic goals for the season 2024-2025. The statistical analysis was carried out in SPSS vol. 30 software. The existence of statistically significant relationships between the different variables was tested via Fisher's exact test and T-test at the 95% confidence interval.

Table 1. List of clubs included in the sample.

<i>Club</i>	<i>Sport</i>	<i>Official website</i>	<i>Dates of the last 50 2024 items</i>
Olympiacos	Football	olympiacos.org	07.12.24 - 31.12.24
Panathinaikos	Football	pao.gr	04.12.24 - 30.12.24
AEK	Football	aekfc.gr	20.11.24 - 28.12.24
PAOK	Football	paokfc.gr	17.12.24 - 31.12.24
Aris	Football	arisfc.com.gr	24.11.24 - 31.12.24
Panathinaikos	Basketball	paobc.gr	17.11.24 - 29.12.24
Olympiacos	Basketball	olympiacosbc.gr	16.12.24 - 31.12.24

Results

Propaganda techniques per sport and propaganda color

RQ1: What are the most common propaganda techniques used in announcements made by the clubs in their official websites? Are there any differences between football and basketball clubs, and propaganda colors as well?

Table 2. Frequency of propaganda techniques.

<i>Propaganda technique</i>	<i>Yes %</i>	<i>No %</i>	<i>Yes N</i>	<i>No N</i>
Card-stacking	17.7	82.3	62	288
Plain folks	9.1	90.9	32	318
Glittering generalities	22.3	77.7	78	272
Name-calling	4.6	95.4	16	334
Bandwagon	15.7	84.3	55	295
Testimonials	14.9	85.1	52	298

Transfer	4.9	95.1	17	333
Other techniques	11.7	88.3	41	309
Construction of the enemy	1.1	98.9	4	346

As we notice in Table 2, glittering generalities (22.3%) are the most frequently used propaganda technique in the sample. Glittering generalities have to do with words that have a positive central concept and comprise a topos for manufacturing consent around them. Card-stacking follows (17.7%), while the clubs attempt to provide their own interpretations and meanings. Bandwagon (15.7%) comes third. In most of the cases used bandwagon was employed because the clubs wanted to show that they follow some modern tendencies on sports, social behavior and so on. Regarding the IPA techniques, name-calling was the least used (4.6%). Name-calling is related to a propaganda which aims to degrade the subject, objects or processes it describes. At the same time, construction of the enemy is almost rare (1.4%). These last two tendencies show us that the official websites are not used frequently to prescribe negative notions to the opponents.

Table 3. Crosstabulations of techniques with sports.

<i>Propaganda technique</i>	<i>Football %</i>	<i>Basketball %</i>	<i>Fisher's</i>
Card-stacking	18.4	16.0	0.65
Plain folks	6.4	16.0	0.01
Glittering generalities	20.8	26.0	0.32
Name-calling	6.0	1.0	0.05
Bandwagon	12.8	23.0	0.02
Testimonials	13.2	19.0	0.18
Transfer	4.0	7.0	0.27
Other techniques	11.2	13.0	0.71
Construction of the enemy	1.6	0.0	0.58

Our sample reveals few statistically significant differences between the two sports. Statistically significant results were observed for only three of the nine techniques used as dependent variables (plain folks, bandwagon and, marginally, name-calling). What we must keep from Table 3 is that football clubs (6%) tend to use more frequently the name-calling technique (despite its rarity in Table 2) compared to basketball clubs (1%). On the other hand, basketball players are found to be more commonly presented as simple

working men, and this leads to an almost 10% difference in the use of plain folks between the two sports (6.4% in football clubs and 16% in basketball). In the same vein, bandwagon, the third most frequently employed technique in our sample according to Table 2, is found more frequently in basketball clubs' official websites (23%) compared to football ones (12.8%).

Table 4. Frequency of propaganda color.

<i>Propaganda color</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>
No propaganda	49.7	174
White	39.1	137
Gray	9.4	33
Black	1.7	6

Concerning the colors of propaganda, Table 4 shows that there is a dichotomy of our sample, while more than half of it (50.2%) includes propaganda. However, the dominant propaganda color is white (39.1%), while the items where black propaganda were found, are very few (1.7%). Thus, the official websites of sports clubs in Greece are considered as places for white, commercial propaganda. As a result, in Table 5 we investigate only those items that were colored (176 news items) and we examine gray and black propaganda as a common category (summing 39 news items) due to the scarcity of black propaganda in our sample.

Table 5. Crosstabulations of techniques with propaganda color.

<i>Propaganda technique</i>	<i>White %</i>	<i>Gray/black %</i>	<i>Fisher's</i>
Card-stacking	22.6	74.4	0.00
Plain folks	17.5	15.4	1.00
Glittering generalities	42.3	48.7	0.58
Name-calling	5.1	23.1	0.00
Bandwagon	33.6	23.1	0.24
Testimonials	25.5	41.0	0.07
Transfer	8.8	12.8	0.54
Other techniques	18.2	38.5	0.02
Construction of the enemy	0.0	10.3	0.00

Statistically significant results are observed for four of the nine techniques considered as dependent variable (card-stacking, name-calling, other techniques and construction of the enemy). It is evident from Table 5 that gray/black propaganda

exhibits a higher propensity for the utilization of all the aforementioned four variables. The present study's findings indicate that the utilization of these four techniques is amplified when a news item is categorized as either grey or black propaganda. It can thus be hypothesized that card-stacking, name-calling and the construction of an enemy are techniques that are particularly effective in the context of negative propaganda. Concerning construction of the enemy specifically, although it was found only four times in our sample, all of them were in the announcements of football clubs. Finally, the clubs tend to employ simpler techniques (what are called other techniques in Table 5), when they want to defame their opponents (38.5%) compared to when their propaganda is white (18.2%).

Types of topics hosted in the official websites

RQ2: What are the most dominant types of topics in clubs' announcements? Are there any differences noticed between sports, as well as propaganda colors?

Table 6. Frequency of topic types.

<i>Topic type</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>
Political	2.3	8
Economic	14.0	49
Social	15.7	55
Cultural	96.0	336
Pure sports	79.4	278

Table 6 shows that the vast majority of the sample was about cultural issues (96%), something that was expected due to sports being a subfield of culture. Nevertheless, sports issues are less common compared to the cultural ones, while their percentage (79.4%) is 16.6% smaller, provided that all the pure sports issues are also considered as cultural. Social (15.7%) and economic (14%) topics follow in the same Table. Most of the social issues were related to the clubs' social responsibility. The economic type of topics encompassed issues such as sales, tickets and sponsorships. The least prevalent category is political (2.3%). This finding seems to be in alignment with the preceding research question concerning propaganda, as issues of power tend to be absent from the official websites' agenda.

Table 7. Crosstabulations of topic type with sports.

<i>Topic type</i>	<i>Football %</i>	<i>Basketball %</i>	<i>Fisher's</i>
Political	3.2	0.0	0.11
Economic	10.0	24.0	0.00
Social	16.8	13.0	0.42
Cultural	95.2	98.0	0.36
Pure sports	76.0	88.0	0.01

Table 7 is indicative of some tendencies observed by comparing the two sports. While no statistically significant differences were observed between the sports in three out of five topic types, the findings of this study suggest that economic (24%) and pure sports issues (88%) are covered to a greater extent by basketball clubs. Simultaneously, football clubs have been observed to incorporate a greater proportion of political (3.2%) and social issues (16.8%) into their respective agendas. However, this discrepancy does not attain statistical significance when subjected to Fisher's exact test.

Table 8. Crosstabulations of topic types with propaganda color.

<i>Topic type</i>	<i>White %</i>	<i>Gray/black %</i>	<i>Fisher's</i>
Political	1.5	15.4	0.00
Economic	32.1	7.7	0.00
Social	22.6	30.8	0.30
Cultural	95.6	92.3	0.42
Pure sports	75.2	64.1	0.22

As illustrated in Table 8, the utilization of specific topic categories, namely political and economic subjects, is found to be more prevalent in specific instances of propaganda. At the same time, differentiation is observed in other topic types, too. However, our sample does not indicate statistically significant relationship between the variables of social, cultural and pure sports issues, and propaganda color. In order to provide a more solid foundation for future research in this field, it would prove beneficial for further analyses of these crosstabulations to be conducted on an enlarged sample. Political issues raise up to 15.4% in grey or black propaganda environment, despite being only 1.5% in white propaganda. Gray and black propaganda seem to match power issues and vice versa. In contrast, economic issues are significantly more prevalent in white propaganda (32.1%) than in black and grey propaganda (7.7%). This finding

serves to confirm the theoretical framework underpinning the study, as it was found that economic issues encompassed subjects such as sales, ticket prices and special offers.

Commentary and evaluative discourse

RQ3: Are the announcements commentary oriented and to what extent? Are there any differences noticed between sports, as well as propaganda colors?

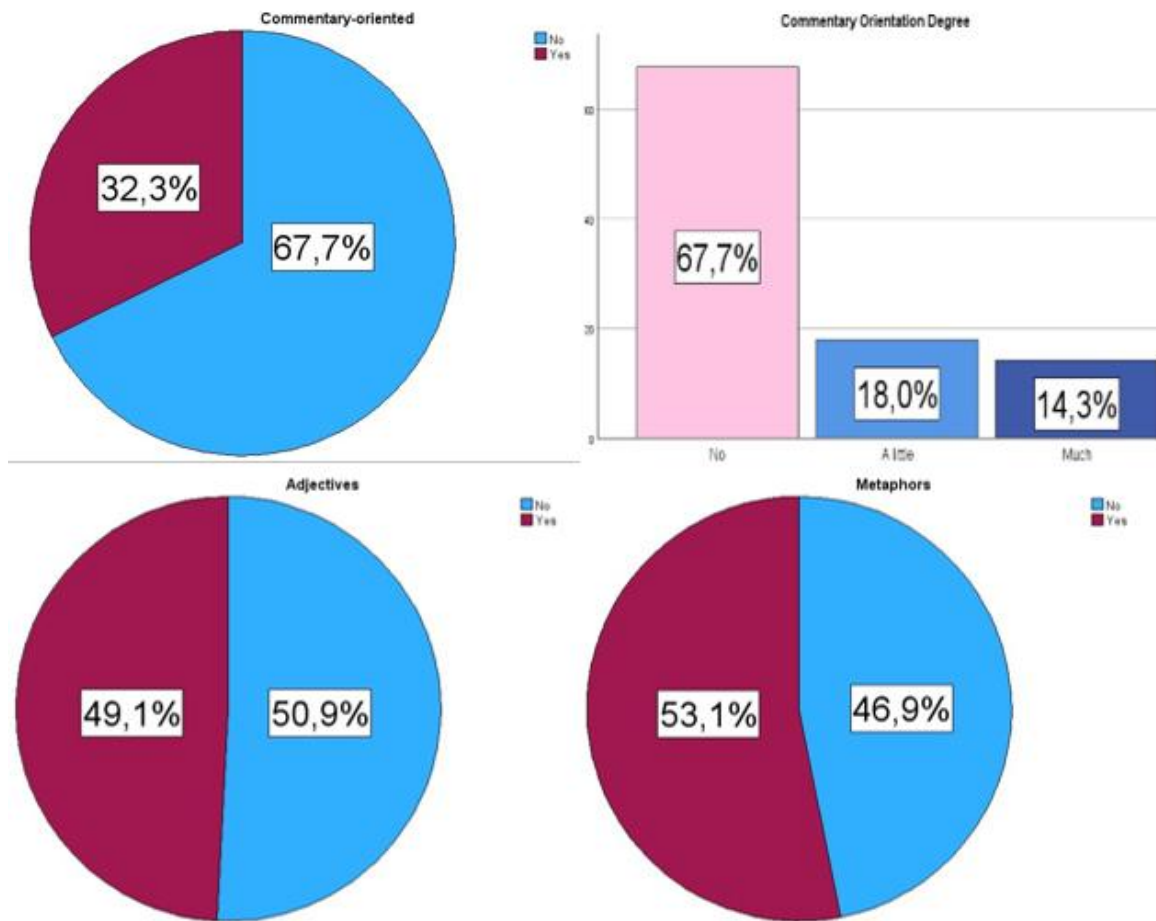


Figure 1. Percent of the values of the variables utilized to count commentary.

As was described earlier in this paper, this research counts commentary by employing four different variables. First of all, 32.3% of the sample's news items are oriented towards commentary. The same percentage is also broken down into two values with the help of an ordinal variable aiming to count the extent of this orientation. 18% of the sample is found to be commentary-oriented a little, while there is also 14.3% which is much commentary-oriented. Another couple of variables is employed to investigate elements of evaluative discourse. Almost one out of two units of analysis includes evaluative adjectives (49.1%) and 53.1% of the sample uses metaphors.

In order to investigate the differences between the two sports we analyzed our sample with Fisher's exact test and T-test. Nevertheless, there are no statistically significant results between the four variables counting commentary and the independent variable of sport. All of them are found to be insignificant, as the differentiation between the two sports was light. Thus, we decided not to attach a table with those statistics. Conversely, of high interest seem to be the results concerning the color of propaganda.

Table 9. Crosstabulations of elements of evaluative discourse with propaganda color.

<i>Variable</i>	<i>White %</i>	<i>Gray/black %</i>	<i>Fisher's</i>
Commentary-oriented	38.0	82.1	0.00
Adjectives	59.1	92.3	0.00
Metaphors	56.2	92.3	0.00

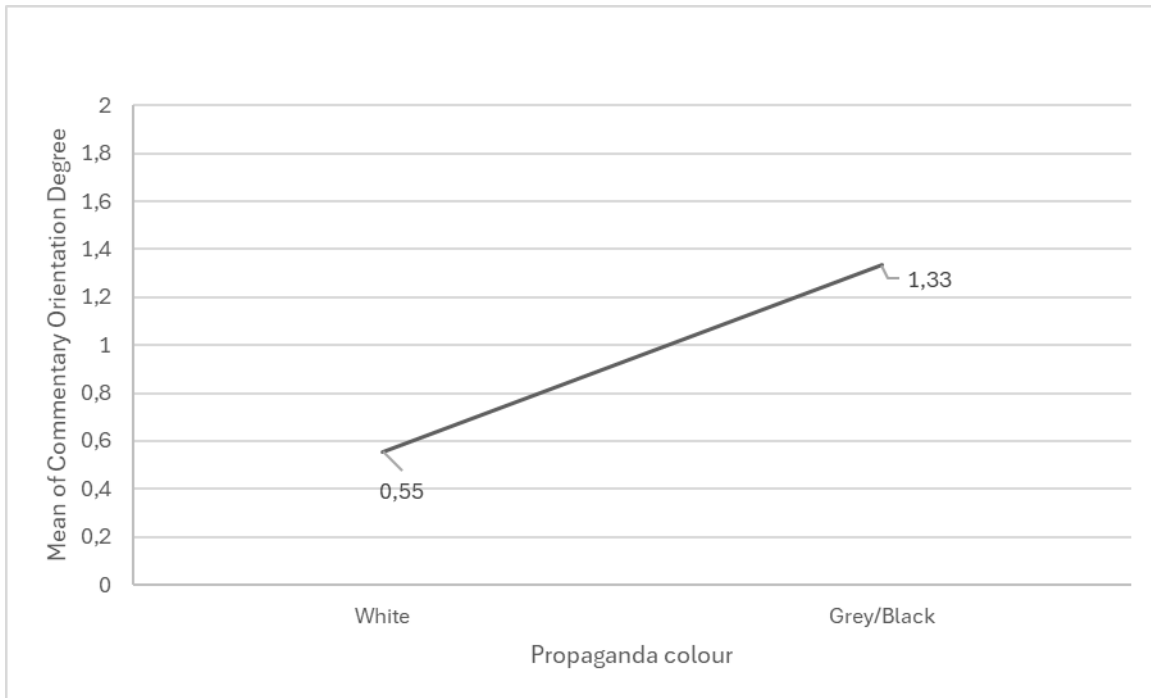


Figure 2. Means of commentary orientation degree (T-test p value = 0.00) per propaganda color.

As documented in Table 9 and Figure 2, all the statistical tests have proved to be statistically significant. In the context of grey or black propaganda, commentary-oriented issues have been shown to account for up to 82.1% of the gray and black propaganda, in contrast to the 38% observed in white propaganda. It appears that the color grey and black propaganda are inextricably linked to commentary-oriented coverage of issues.

The same happens with both adjectives and metaphors, while the vast majority of gray and black propaganda contains adjectives (92.3%) and metaphors (92.3%). The corresponding percentages tend to be smaller in white propaganda (59.1% and 56.2% respectively). Figure 2 also impels that the degree of commentary orientation is higher in gray and black propaganda (1.33 mean) compared to white (0.55 mean). This finding enhances the assumptions made in the theoretical framework concerning the usage of evaluative discourse in propaganda and the articulation of propagandistic discourse as a mixture of pragmatic and evaluative discourse.

Conclusions

A white propaganda mechanism

In relation to *RQ1: What are the most common propaganda techniques used in announcements made by the clubs in their official websites?*, the research findings indicate that the most commonly used techniques are glittering generalities, card-stacking, bandwagon and testimonials. Plain folks and bandwagon are more frequently employed by basketball clubs, while "name-calling" is a practice more commonly associated with football clubs. The utilization of techniques such as card-stacking, name-calling, other, simpler techniques, and the construction of an enemy, is more prevalent in the context of grey or black propaganda.

In response to *RQ2: What are the most dominant types of topics in clubs' announcements?*, the study reveals that pure sports and, consequentially, cultural topics predominate in club announcements. The remaining topic categories are encountered less frequently. It has been observed that basketball clubs are more inclined to publish issues pertaining to sport and the economy in comparison to football clubs. Furthermore, political topics appear to align more closely with grey or black propaganda, while economic subjects tend to align with white propaganda.

Answering *RQ3: Are the announcements commentary oriented and to what extent?*, A tendency towards the evolution of evaluative discourse is evident; nevertheless, it is noteworthy that merely one-third of the sample is classified as commentary-oriented. No statistically significant differences were observed with regard to sports. Instead, all four variables measuring orientation to comment that were employed are encountered much more frequently and with greater intensity when grey or black propaganda is observed. The present study has demonstrated that evaluative discourse is intense in our sample, irrespective of the sport. Nevertheless, it is encountered with far greater frequency in

grey or black propaganda. Therefore, we confirm that evaluative discourse is a crucial ingredient of propagandistic discourse.

The official websites of the clubs appear to maintain a level of seriousness and avoid the polarization observed in the teams' SNS accounts or among the fans. This phenomenon is likely associated with the websites' primary function as a medium for disseminating white propaganda, particularly when basketball is concerned. Within the same context, the predominance of pure sports issues, particularly in basketball clubs' official websites, is also noteworthy, as four out of five news items are directly related to sports. In the context of agenda-setting, economic issues are frequently associated with white propaganda, while political issues are more often linked to grey or black propaganda.

In relation to propaganda techniques, this view is further reinforced by the limited and rare use of enemy construction, a feature which was only observed in football clubs. The most frequently encountered techniques in the present sample were found to be glittering generalities and card-stacking. It has been posited that the former exhibits a positive dimension that is characteristic of white propaganda, while the latter signals a more negative notion. Bandwagon and plain folks are more frequently employed in the websites of basketball clubs. In general, white propaganda is found to have dominated the official websites of basketball clubs to a greater extent, while grey and black have been identified as being more prevalent in football clubs' official websites.

References

- Alvanos, R. (2008). Public relations and propaganda: An effort to clarify a difficult-to-determine relationship. *Communication Issues*, 8, 46-60.
- Bennett, G. (2020). Propaganda and disinformation: How a historical perspective aids critical response development. In P. Baines, N. O'Shaughnessy & N. Snow (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of propaganda* (pp. 245-260). London, UK: SAGE.
- Bernays, E. (1923). *Crystallizing public opinion*. New York, NY: Boni and Liveright.
- Bernays, E. (1928). *Propaganda*. New York, NY: Horace Liveright.
- Chatzikonstantinou, M. & Tastsoglou, M. (2023). Anti and post: Contemporary aspects of anti-communism and post-truth. In N. Demertzis & A. Charalampi (Eds.), *Societies and sociologies in the 21st century. Proceedings of the 8th Conference of Hellenic Sociological Society* (pp. 1196-1207). Athens, Greece: Hellenic Sociological Society.

- Ellul, J. (1968). *Propaganda: The formation of men's attitudes*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.
- Fiske, J. (1989). *Reading the popular*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Gialabouki L. (2008). *Journalistic discourse and intertextuality*. PhD thesis. Thessaloniki, Greece: Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.
- Hallin, D. C., & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Herman, E. & Chomsky, N. (1988). *Manufacturing consent: The political economy of the mass media*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.
- Hilmes, M. (2013). The new vehicle of nationalism": Radio goes to war. In J. Auerbach & R. Castronovo (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of propaganda studies* (pp. 201-218). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- IPA (1939). *The fine art of propaganda: A study of Father Coughlin's speeches*. New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace and Co.
- Jowett, G. S. & O'Donnell, V. (2006). *Propaganda and persuasion*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.
- Kovach, B. & Rosenstiel, T. (2001). *The elements of journalism: What newspeople should know and the public should expect*. New York, NY: Three Rivers Press.
- Kristensen, L. M., & Bro, P. (2023). News values in a digital age: Intra-media, inter-media, and extra-media platforms. *Journalism*, 25(4), 819-836.
- L'Etang, J. (2008). Public relations, persuasion and propaganda: Truth, knowledge, spirituality and mystique. In A. Zerfass, B. van Ruler & K. Sriramesh (Eds.), *Public relations research: European and international perspectives and innovations* (pp. 251-270). Wiesbaden, Germany: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Lilleker, D. G. (2006). *Key concepts in political communication*. London, UK: SAGE.
- McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2), 176-187.
- Morris, T. & Goldsworthy, S. (2021). *Public relations ethics: The real-world guide*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Pleios, G. (2001). *Discourse of image: Ideology and politics*. Athens, Greece: Papazissis.
- Poulakidakos, S. (2014). *Propaganda and Public Discourse. The presentation of the MoU by the Greek Media*. Athens, Greece: DaVinci.
- Scheufele, D. A. & Tewksbury, D. (2007). Framing, agenda setting, and priming: The

evolution of three media effects models. *Journal of Communication*, 57, 9-20.

Shabo, M. E. (2008). *Techniques of propaganda & persuasion*. Smyrna, DE: Prestwick House.

Sheafer, T. (2007). How to evaluate it: The role of story-evaluative tone in agenda setting and priming. *Journal of Communication*, 57, 21-39.

Taylor, P. M. (2003). *Munitions of the mind: A history of propaganda from the ancient world to the present era*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.

Tye, L. (1998). *The father of spin: Edward Bernays and the birth of public relations*. New York, NY: Crown Publishers.

Viertmann, C. (2018). Scapegoating in media coverage: Analysing blame-giving rituals in the public sphere. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 7(3), 261-278.