

Selling War: Critical Approaches to Propaganda and Disinformation in Political and Media Discourses on Contemporary Conflicts

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War has never been confined to the battlefield. From ancient victory inscriptions to twentieth-century propaganda activities, those who ignite war have always sought to shape how the public perceives it (see Jowett & O'Donnell, 2019). What distinguishes contemporary conflicts, however, is the speed, scale and reach of these efforts, which are realised in political and media discourses. These discourses, thus, play a decisive role at every stage of war: they set the scene for it, legitimise and intensify it and define the exit terms. In this sense, political and media actors take part in war alongside soldiers and commanders. They wage a parallel *soft war* by propagating their ideologies, constructing enemies and disseminating (dis)information that celebrates the victories of the Self and magnifies the losses of the Other—a polarisation captured in van Dijk's (1998) notion of the ideological square. This discursive war seeks to conquer not territory but the hearts and minds of publics, persuading them to support one side and to accept the costs and hardships of war, or, in short, *selling them the war*.

Aims and Scope

This volume seeks to foster critical discussion of the ways in which political and media discourses contribute to contemporary wars and conflicts. By bringing together multiple perspectives, it examines how wars are justified and contested in political and media discourse, how far these justifications withstand critical scrutiny, and how political and media actors mobilise public support through propaganda and disinformation.

To this end, the volume invites contributions within critical discourse studies, which, as an interdisciplinary field, integrates insights from linguistics, argumentation theory and rhetoric, media and communication studies, journalism, philosophy, political science and international relations. Within this framework, the volume welcomes a diversity of theoretical and analytical approaches, including rhetorical and argumentation analysis, corpus-assisted discourse studies, cognitive approaches to critical discourse analysis, conceptual metaphor analysis, multimodal analysis, framing theory, cross-cultural studies. Analyses of under-examined conflicts and non-Western discourses are particularly welcome.

Thematically, the volume is centered around, but by no means restricted to, the following topics:

1. Legitimation and delegitimation strategies, including the justification of retaliation and pre-emptive action
2. Identity construction and the representation of Self and Other
3. The discursive construction of national identity in the face of threats from the Other, the geopolitical scope attributed to these threats and the responses they are used to justify
4. Fear, securitisation and the politics of emergency including the argumentative use of fear appeals
5. The attribution of agency, intentionality and responsibility, including claims of provocation and necessity (“they left us no choice”) and shifts in the burden of proof
6. Metaphor, narrative and framing in war discourse, including metaphor as a form of argument
7. News reporting and the representation of victims and casualties
8. Social media as a battlefield: the online legitimisation and contestation of war and the participatory spread of propaganda and disinformation
9. Multimodal propaganda and argumentation, including AI-generated content and deepfakes
10. Contesting war discourse: fact-checking, counter-propaganda and discourses of dissent and resistance
11. Discourses of ceasefire, negotiation and peace, including argumentation in peace talks and mediation

Abstracts

Abstract proposals should not exceed 500 words (including references) and should outline the research problem, objectives, methodology and research questions. Abstracts should clearly describe the research process and avoid lengthy introductions or speculative claims about findings.

Abstracts should be submitted electronically via the following link:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdHNSE6N4m-KFFCudSsIz2f7U1bTBox7vDw2mbGDZV5rnXk5A/viewform?usp=publish-editor>

Important Dates

- Abstract submission deadline: 25 November 2026
- Notification of abstract acceptance: 30 November 2026
- Full chapter submission deadline: 30 March 2027