

The Role of Digital Media in Addressing Cognitive Warfare in Iraq

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Abstract

Purpose: This article aims to understand and recognize the role of digital media in addressing cognitive warfare in Iraq, as well as explore how digital media can effectively confront and navigate the ongoing conflicts in the country. Given Iraq's history of external occupation and current interventions by Western nations, the Iraqi society has become a prime target for cognitive warfare attacks.

Method: To address this research question, thematic analysis of interviews with 20 media and cognitive warfare experts in Iraq was conducted, including professors from Mazaya, Imam Kazem, Farahidi, Baghdad, and Dhiqar universities, until theoretical saturation was achieved.

Findings: The analysis of the primary themes derived from the interviews indicates that audience-oriented approaches and professionalism are fundamental strategies that digital media should adopt to effectively address cognitive warfare. In this context, education and awareness-raising, mobilizing public opinion, promoting knowledge and self-confidence within society, and fostering community cohesion are essential components that contribute to audience-centeredness. Furthermore, to achieve professionalism, it is crucial to focus on digital capacity building and the advancement of persuasive journalism within Iraqi society.

Conclusion: To effectively address cognitive warfare, both traditional and new media in Iraq must devote significant attention to this issue. It is essential for these media outlets to fully comprehend the complexities of cognitive warfare and to prioritize informing and educating the public. By considering the needs and interests of the Iraqi audience, media discussions can become more impactful, enabling the Iraqi people and public opinion to better understand the issue at hand.

Key words: cognitive warfare; digital media; coping strategy; soft power, digital technology

Article type: Research

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Introduction

Cognitive warfare, a concept derived from cognitive science, does not have a long history in the world's political and military literature. However, the human mind has always been a tool for influencing and controlling perception, making the study of related processes a longstanding aspect of scientific history. According to studies conducted by researchers at Johns Hopkins University and Imperial College London (2020), cognitive warfare today integrates cyber, information, psychological, and social engineering capabilities to achieve its objectives. Utilizing the Internet and social media, it selectively targets influential individuals, specific groups, and large numbers of citizens in society to create doubt, introduce opposing narratives, polarize thoughts, radicalize groups, and motivate actions that can disrupt or disintegrate a cohesive society (Bernal & et al., 2020: 48).

This phenomenon is particularly evident in Iraqi society, which faces numerous issues and challenges in legislation and media policy-making. The lack of a clear and unambiguous policy on media administration and management in modern Iraq has created opportunities for adversaries to infiltrate and exploit the media. Digital or new media have the capability to disseminate both accurate and unreliable information, making them a powerful tool in cognitive warfare. Digital media can enhance digital literacy among the population, enabling them to discern between truthful and misleading information.

This article aims to explore the role of digital media in countering cognitive warfare in Iraq, addressing the question of how digital media can be utilized to confront this threat. To achieve this goal and answer the research questions, thematic analysis was conducted through interviews with experts and specialists in media, communications, and cognitive warfare in Iraq.

Materials and Methods

This research utilized qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis techniques. According to methodologists in the last two decades, "thematic analysis has become an increasingly common way to engage with qualitative data" (Joffe, 2012: 213).

For this study, the in-depth interview method was employed to gather data. Interviews were conducted with experts and specialists in the fields of media, communications, and cognitive warfare in Iraq, including professors from Mazaya, Imam Kazim (AS), Farahidi, Baghdad, and Dhiqar universities, until theoretical saturation was achieved. A total of 20 interviews were conducted with these individuals between August 1, 2023, and November 30, 2023, using standardized interview questions related to the research topic. Subsequently, the interview transcripts were coded, and key concepts were extracted. To ensure research validity, the coding was reviewed and approved by three professors of communication sciences.

Results and Discussion

From the perspective of Iraqi experts and scholars, cognitive warfare poses a potential and actual threat to the country that requires attention and scrutiny. Understanding the various dimensions of this war is crucial, as it allows for the adoption of effective strategies to counter it. New and digital media, while influential among the people, also present a double-edged sword in this context, as they can be used both to combat cognitive warfare and as a tool for enemy attacks. Therefore, it is essential to have a correct understanding of these media and assess their ability to counter this type of warfare.

According to the data in Table 1, digital and new media have the potential to educate and raise awareness among the Iraqi public about cognitive warfare, providing them with the knowledge needed to avoid deception. These media platforms also have the ability to mobilize public opinion, fostering solidarity among the Iraqi people. The growth of digital media has created opportunities to produce content that aligns with the goals of countering cognitive warfare, emphasizing the importance of building digital capacity in Iraqi society.

To effectively impact the audience in advertising and news, it is necessary to employ persuasive techniques. Journalism that persuades the audience can be a valuable tool in cyberspace. Developing persuasive journalism that meets the information and news needs of the audience with an audience persuasion approach is crucial, particularly in the face of regional and trans-regional networks operating in Iraq.

Digital media can also play a role in promoting knowledge and self-confidence in society, enhancing the ability to combat cognitive warfare. Strengthening the connection between the government, society, and individuals is essential to resist efforts to divide society and weaken unity. By providing quality and attractive content using multimedia tools, digital media can help combat fake news and misinformation, ultimately empowering the audience to resist cognitive warfare.

In conclusion, an audience-centered approach that focuses on educating and empowering the audience is key to effectively countering cognitive warfare. By expanding knowledge and self-confidence in society and addressing vulnerabilities, digital media can play a crucial role in strengthening societal resilience and unity.

Table 1- Basic and Organizing Themes

Basic Themes	Organizing Themes
Making citizens aware about the dangers of war	Education and promotion of awareness
society aware of ways to cope Making	
Enrichment of digital media education	
Encouraging people to learn how to cope	Mobilization of public opinion
Increasing people's awareness of commitment to the country	
Discussion about cognitive issues	
public attention to the war of knowledge Drawing	
Increasing awareness and mobilization for internal surveillance of the people	Digital capacity building
Quantitative and qualitative growth of digital media	
attractions Creating mental and emotional	
Breaking the wall between knowledge and entertainment	
Taking advantage of the speed of digital penetration among the layers of society	Development of persuasive journalism
People 's awareness of the deception of digital media	
Taking advantage of journalism journalism	
Using persuasive methods to cope	-Promotion of knowledge and self confidence in society
Focusing on the place of poisons to deal with cognitive warfare	
warfare Elevating the European spirit with cognitive	
Improving the level of cognitive values among people	
The creation of Armenian faces with the war of knowledge	
Emphasis on the values of knowing the target audience	
Using the element of shock to distract the audience	Bringing people together
actions leading to deviation Minimize	
Surrounding and especially the society the youth	
Providing space for public discussion	
Providing a level playing field for the general public	
Perfect sync with people	
important human potentials in society Taking advantage of	

Table2- Organizing and Global Themes

Organizing Themes	Global Themes
Digital capacity building	Professionalism
Development of persuasive journalism	
Education and promotion of awareness	Audience oriented
Mobilization of public opinion	
confidence in -Promotion of knowledge and self society	
Bringing people together	

Conclusion

Countering cognitive warfare requires raising public awareness and aligning them with government policies based on national interests. Digital media can play a fundamental role in this direction due to their ease of access. According to research, an audience-oriented approach and professionalism are key strategies for digital media in countering cognitive warfare. These approaches highlight the influential role of digital media in shaping the future of cognitive warfare.

In Iraqi society, the lack of political stability since 2003 and the influence of ethnic and religious groups have led to new aspects of struggle between political groups and enemies. The support of Arab and Western countries for ISIS, along with their development and equipping with capabilities, has enabled ISIS to

effectively use traditional and digital media to influence public opinion. This has created divisions and weakened Iraq's role in the region, such as in the oil market.

The Iraqi government's inability to govern effectively has been emphasized in recent years, with evidence suggesting that political groups have aligned their actions against the government and legal institutions with the movements of enemies. This deception is part of cognitive warfare, highlighting the need for traditional and new Iraqi media to inform and enlighten public opinion.

Given the low level of literacy in Iraqi society, education on cognitive warfare concepts is essential. Developing media literacy can help increase the impact of discussions and make the topic more accessible to the Iraqi people. Addressing audience demands can also enhance the impact of discussions and help familiarize the public with the topic. Developing media literacy in Iraqi society is a desirable proposition in confronting cognitive warfare.

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Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest.