

THE IMPACT OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION ON SECURITY CULTURE

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Résumé : L'objectif de cet article est d'analyser l'impact de la communication stratégique sur la culture de sécurité, en soulignant comment elle peut être utilisée pour renforcer la résilience sociétale face aux menaces hybrides et à la désinformation.

La communication stratégique est une dimension essentielle pour renforcer la culture de sécurité d'un État, en particulier dans un contexte géopolitique instable. La République de Moldavie, située entre l'Est et l'Ouest, est confrontée à des défis complexes, notamment les menaces hybrides, la désinformation et les vulnérabilités systémiques. Cet article explore l'impact de la communication stratégique sur la culture de sécurité, en illustrant son rôle dans le renforcement de la résilience sociétale avec des exemples pertinents du contexte moldave. Nous souhaitons fournir une perspective globale sur la manière dont la communication stratégique peut servir d'outil essentiel pour préserver la sécurité nationale et renforcer la culture de sécurité tout en offrant des solutions pratiques aux décideurs politiques et aux professionnels du domaine.

Mots-clés : communication stratégique, sécurité nationale, culture de sécurité, résilience sociétale.

Introduction

Strategic communication influences public perceptions of national security by educating citizens, shaping narratives, and mobilizing them. Security culture, in turn, conditions the effectiveness of strategic messages, determining the public's level of receptivity. In the Republic of Moldova, this interdependent relationship is reflected in campaigns aimed at countering disinformation and promoting a resilient national identity.

A strong security culture is essential for a state's resilience against threats. It fosters a shared understanding of risks, trust in security institutions, and active citizen participation in crisis prevention and management. Moreover, it facilitates interinstitutional and international cooperation, contributing to regional and global stability. Through narratives that emphasize common threats and the need for solidarity, strategic communication can mobilize citizens in support of security efforts.

Conceptual Framework

Strategic communication is an interdisciplinary field aimed at influencing the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of target audiences to achieve organizational or national objectives. According to Hallahan et al. (2007: 3-35), strategic communication is “the process by which organizations communicate their mission and values to create a shared understanding with stakeholders and achieve strategic goals.”

Furthermore, this concept is defined as a deliberate and coordinated process of message transmission, intended to shape public perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours in a way that supports organizational or national objectives (Paul, 2011: 22).

In the field of security, strategic communication requires a deep understanding of the target audience, cultural context, and socio-political dynamics. Effective coordination between various institutions and government agencies is essential to ensuring the coherence and effectiveness of messages (Corman et al., 2008: 208).

Becoming an indispensable tool in managing and countering contemporary threats, strategic communication—through careful planning and coordination of messages—can shape public perceptions, strengthen security culture, and support government policies.

The subject of our research is security culture, which encompasses the set of values, beliefs, norms, and practices that influence how a society perceives and responds to security risks and threats (Snyder, 1990: 5-41). It reflects the level of awareness and engagement of citizens in supporting national security efforts.

In the context of information warfare and disinformation campaigns, strategic communication goes beyond merely transmitting information; it involves shaping narratives and using symbols to build societal resilience. Therefore, we can assert that a **participatory political culture** supports security culture by encouraging citizens to engage in discussions and decisions related to national security. This fosters transparency, accountability, and trust in institutions.

Security culture is a concept that reflects how societies perceive and approach security issues. According to Jeannie L. Johnson and Matthew T. Berrett (2011: 1-22), security culture is “the set of practices, attitudes, norms, and beliefs that shape how a state or organization approaches security.”

Constructivists argue that security culture is the result of interactions between social actors and collective interpretations of events (Wendt, 1992: 391-425). Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde (1998: 239) developed the securitization theory, which explains how security culture influences the securitization process by determining whether the public accepts or rejects security-related statements.

According to Alastair Iain Johnston (1995: 328), strategic culture is a historically shaped set of beliefs and behaviors regarding the use of military force, which influences security policy. This culture affects how states perceive and respond to threats.

Methods Through Which Strategic Communication Can Influence and Shape Security Culture

One of the primary methods through which strategic communication can influence and shape security culture is the dissemination of information and public education. Informing citizens about risks and security measures plays a crucial role in building a resilient society. Without adequate knowledge, people may underestimate the severity of certain situations, making them more vulnerable to various threats. By conveying clear and accessible information, authorities and civil society institutions can shape public perceptions, leading to the adoption of more responsible behaviors.

However, educating citizens goes beyond merely providing raw information—it involves explaining the context, consequences, and possible solutions. This fosters a deep awareness of risks such as disinformation and hybrid threats.

In this context, the Republic of Moldova, which faces hybrid threats, must strengthen its security culture, particularly in terms of navigating the information space and using social media responsibly. Disinformation, fake news, and the intensification of attacks by certain state entities against democratic values and national interests necessitate the development of an effective response mechanism.

Establishing a nationwide strategic communication process serves as a long-term solution for countering these threats. This approach enhances societal resilience, strengthens social cohesion, and fosters the development of strategic communication principles, ensuring a more secure and informed society (Mârzac, Sanda, 2022).

Another method through which **strategic communication** influences security culture in society is **the formation of narratives and symbols**. The use of **archetypes and national symbols** in communication can strengthen identity and social cohesion. Integrating archetypes into strategic communication offers significant benefits, as they resonate deeply with human psychology and align with the experiences and emotions of **Moldovan citizens**.

By leveraging positive archetypes, strategic communication can increase public trust in state institutions such as the Ministry of Internal Affairs or the National Army, which are essential for implementing reforms and enhancing societal resilience. For instance, promoting the image of a protective and integrity-driven leader can instill a sense of security among citizens.

Moreover, archetypes contribute to fostering national unity, a crucial factor in a diverse society like the Republic of Moldova. By emphasizing shared values, such as respect for tradition and family, strategic communication can help reduce polarization between different regions, such as Gagauzia and the rest of Moldova. For example, awareness campaigns on European integration can highlight the mutual benefits for all citizens, reinforcing a sense of collective purpose and reducing divisions within society.

Social mobilization is one of the most effective methods through which strategic communication influences security culture. Effective communication can encourage active citizen participation in security efforts by shaping perceptions, raising awareness, and motivating action. By using appropriate channels and delivering relevant messages, authorities and organizations can establish a strong connection with the public, inspiring them to take an active role. In this sense, communication should not only be informative but also inspirational to drive engagement. Social mobilization through communication can take place through: awareness campaigns—Campaigns on crime prevention, for example, can encourage citizens to take concrete actions such as installing surveillance systems or

reporting suspicious behavior; Community networks—Establishing neighborhood communication groups using messaging apps like WhatsApp or Telegram can facilitate the rapid exchange of information between citizens and authorities; Public meetings and workshops—Security forums and educational workshops provide citizens with opportunities to better understand risks and learn how to manage them effectively.

Through these strategies, strategic communication becomes a powerful tool in strengthening security culture, fostering collective responsibility, and enhancing societal resilience against contemporary threats.

Current Dimensions of Security Culture

On the other hand, security culture directly influences the effectiveness of strategic communication, shaping how messages are received and interpreted by the public. A well-developed security culture not only affects the perception and interpretation of strategic messages but also determines their long-term effectiveness. In a society with a strong security culture, strategic communication becomes a powerful tool for mobilizing citizens and mitigating risks.

Therefore, it is essential that communication strategies align with the cultural context of the audience while ensuring that education and community engagement remain key priorities.

In an era of globalization and transnational threats, a robust security culture enhances societal resilience and preparedness in facing evolving challenges. By fostering awareness, trust in institutions, and active civic participation, security culture strengthens national stability and contributes to a more secure global environment.

The Role of Security Culture in Policy Acceptance and Risk Reduction

Security culture plays a central role in how the public perceives and accepts state security policies. Without a well-developed security culture, the implementation of such policies may face resistance or distrust, ultimately limiting their effectiveness.

A strong security culture, built on education, transparency, and trust in authorities, facilitates public support and transforms citizens into active partners in maintaining security. Therefore, investing in a robust security culture is a fundamental condition for effectively implementing security policies and ensuring a safe and stable environment.

A well-established security culture that promotes individual and collective responsibility is essential for reducing security vulnerabilities. This implies that every citizen, institution, and organization actively participate in risk prevention, adopting behaviors and measures that contribute to community protection and resource security.

In such a culture, security becomes a shared responsibility, and the positive impact is reflected in the mitigation of threats and their consequences. By fostering a proactive security mindset, societies can strengthen resilience, enhance crisis response, and ensure long-term stability.

A security culture that promotes responsibility has the power to significantly reduce security vulnerabilities. Through education, awareness, and engagement, every individual becomes an active partner in protecting society. In such a culture, security is no longer just a state objective but a collective effort that strengthens social cohesion and resilience. Responsibility is the most effective shield against threats.

Establishing a nationwide strategic communication process serves as a long-term measure for countering threats, enhancing resilience, and strengthening social cohesion.

Moreover, in the current political context, the need for a more dynamic foreign and security policy is becoming increasingly evident. This policy must be accompanied by coordinated communication, built on updated strategies aligned with the international security environment, while also securing strong societal support.

A well-integrated strategic communication approach can bridge the gap between government actions and public perception, ensuring that security efforts are transparent, effective, and widely supported across society (Albu & Mârzac, 2023: 247).

The fundamental elements of security culture—threat perceptions, values and norms, practices and behaviors, as well as institutions and policies—are interdependent and essential for protecting a society. A well-established security culture ensures not only an effective response to risks but also their prevention, through the active involvement of all social actors. Investment in education, transparency, and collaboration is the key to developing a resilient and effective security culture.

Perceptions play a crucial role in security culture, shaping how a society identifies, interprets, and prioritizes risks. These perceptions are influenced by factors such as historical experiences, geopolitical context, and available information.

A clear and well-founded understanding of threats helps in allocating resources efficiently and in designing effective security policies. Societies with a strong security awareness are better prepared to counter threats, ensuring a proactive rather than reactive approach to national and international security challenges.

The values and norms of a society form the foundation of security culture, determining how it approaches the relationship between security, freedom, individual rights, and order. In consolidated democracies, freedom and human rights are often prioritized alongside security. Norms influence citizen behavior, such as reporting suspicious activities or complying with regulations imposed by authorities.

Practices and behaviors represent the concrete actions taken by individuals, organizations, and institutions to prevent and manage threats. Effective practices contribute to strengthening security culture, while deficient practices can increase vulnerabilities. Well-developed practices can prevent threats or minimize their impact.

Institutions and the legislative framework are essential for regulating and enforcing security measures. They provide the necessary structure for preventing, managing, and responding to threats. Security policies establish standards and procedures, ranging from personal data protection regulations to national defense measures.

Security culture is more than just the sum of these components—it represents the interaction between them. For example, threat perceptions influence a society's values and norms, while fundamental values shape practices and behaviors. In turn, adopted practices are supported and regulated by institutions and policies.

Strategic Communication vs. National Security

In the field of national security, strategic communication is an essential tool for managing and preventing threats, strengthening social cohesion, and protecting state interests. Through effective communication, authorities can shape public perceptions, reduce vulnerabilities, and enhance resilience against both internal and external challenges.

Strategic communication is crucial for educating citizens and raising awareness about security risks, whether related to cyberattacks, terrorism, natural disasters, or other threats. For instance, rapid and accurate information during crises—such as pandemics or terrorist attacks—helps prevent panic and provides clear solutions.

An informed public is better equipped to recognize risks and adopt preventive measures, thereby reducing societal vulnerabilities and contributing to a more resilient security culture.

In a context where disinformation and propaganda are increasingly used by hostile actors to destabilize societies and undermine trust in institutions, strategic communication becomes an indispensable defense tool. Countering disinformation helps maintain social cohesion, trust in institutions, and societal resilience.

For example, promoting government transparency can limit the maneuvering space of actors spreading false narratives.

At the national level, strategic communication serves two key purposes and values: Strengthening national unity by fostering a common, inspiring, sustainable, and strategic vision, serving as a platform for long-term strategy and national strategic objectives. Enhancing cooperation and cohesion in achieving strategic goals at both the governmental and societal levels. By effectively implementing strategic communication, states can reinforce resilience, protect democratic values, and counteract efforts aimed at weakening national stability (Mârzac, 2019: 2).

During crises, strategic communication helps unite society around shared values and objectives, reducing tensions and polarization. A unified and resilient society is better equipped to handle threats and recover quickly from crises. For example: promoting messages that emphasize solidarity, unity, and collective responsibility, especially in emergency situations. Or engaging local leaders, civic organizations, and the media to deliver clear and consistent messages.

Strategic communication also plays a crucial role in public diplomacy, helping states promote their values, interests, and enhance their international reputation. A positive international image increases a state's influence and strengthens strategic partnerships. For example, delivering consistent messages in relations with external partners to ensure support for national interests. By leveraging effective strategic communication, states can reinforce their global standing, foster diplomatic trust, and secure long-term international cooperation.

The Role of Strategic Communication in Security

Countering Disinformation and Propaganda Through the provision of accurate, transparent, and timely information, strategic communication can mitigate the negative effects of disinformation, reducing confusion and panic among the population (Lucas & Pomerantsev, 2016: 64). The Republic of Moldova faces a wave of disinformation campaigns, many originating from external sources. One notable initiative was the launch of the “Stop Fals!” campaign, aimed at educating the population on recognizing fake news. By using communication strategies tailored to the local context, citizens were informed about the risks of disinformation, fostering a culture of digital vigilance. The “Stop Fals!” campaign, launched in Moldova, aimed to educate the public on identifying fake news. It utilized accessible informational materials and digital communication channels to reach a wide audience, strengthening media literacy and resilience against manipulative narratives (<https://stopfals.md/>).

Effective communication can enhance social cohesion by promoting shared values and encouraging active citizen participation in security efforts. By fostering a collective sense of responsibility, strategic communication helps societies become more resilient to threats and crises, ensuring greater stability and preparedness (Cornish et al., 2011: 56). The introduction of media education courses in schools in the Republic of Moldova was a

crucial step in building a generation more resilient to informational manipulation. These courses were supported by accessible materials and visual campaigns, explaining in a clear and engaging manner the importance of critical thinking. The implementation of media education in schools has been essential for fostering critical thinking and digital vigilance. These initiatives were backed by UNDP, which invested in innovative educational materials (undp.org). Another notable initiative was the “Moldova Sigură” campaign, which highlighted the importance of citizen involvement in community security. By utilizing archetypes such as “The Protector” and “The United Family”, strategic communication strengthened the sense of belonging and collective responsibility. The “Moldova Sigură” campaign emphasized the role of local communities in national security, promoting values such as collective responsibility and active civic engagement in safeguarding public safety.

By explaining and justifying political decisions, strategic communication can increase public trust in institutions and facilitate the implementation of security policies (Farwell, 2012: 288). A relevant initiative in this regard is the awareness campaign launched by the IOM and the Police to promote community safety. Developed in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the General Inspectorate of Police, this campaign aims to enhance security within communities in the Republic of Moldova. By fostering public engagement and trust, such initiatives strengthen cooperation between citizens and authorities, contributing to a more resilient and secure society (<https://moldova.iom.int/ro/news/campania-de-informare-oim-si-politiei-pentru-promovarea-sigurantei-comunitare-republica-moldova-fost-lansata>).

States can leverage strategic communication to promote their interests and values on the global stage, shaping the opinions and behaviors of international actors (Melissen, 2005). A notable example is the “Help Moldova Become a Safer Country” campaign. This initiative, supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), aims to raise awareness about the dangers associated with firearms and encourage the surrender of illegally owned weapons. By integrating strategic messaging with international cooperation, such campaigns contribute to enhanced security, greater public awareness, and stronger partnerships on a global scale (<https://www.undp.org/>).

The success of the mentioned initiatives demonstrates that well-planned strategic communication can shift perceptions and strengthen societal resilience. However, challenges such as social polarization and limited financial resources for large-scale campaigns still persist.

Strategic communication employs a variety of mechanisms and tools to influence the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of target audiences in order to achieve organizational or national objectives. These mechanisms can be classified based on: communication channels used, technology employed, nature of the message, target audience. By adapting communication strategies to these factors, governments and organizations can enhance the effectiveness of their messaging, fostering greater public engagement and long-term impact (Hallahan et al., 2007: 3-35).

Effective strategic communication requires interinstitutional coordination and the engagement of various societal sectors, including government, the private sector, civil society, and the media. It must be culturally adapted and employ a diverse range of channels and methods, from traditional media to digital platforms and social media, incorporating archetypes to enhance message resonance.

In Republic of Moldova, strategic communication can leverage various mechanisms to shape public perceptions. These may range from television and social media campaigns to public events in rural communities. For instance, initiatives like the “Moldova Without

Corruption” campaign can be amplified by delivering messages that emphasize values of honesty and transparency. By using targeted communication strategies, such initiatives can increase public awareness, strengthen civic engagement, and build trust in institutions.

Drawing inspiration from Estonia’s model, the Republic of Moldova can launch digital education campaigns to increase awareness of cybersecurity, particularly in the context of government service digitalization. Enhancing digital literacy would empower citizens to better recognize and mitigate cyber threats, strengthening national resilience.

Additionally, Finland’s holistic approach, which integrates the government, private sector, and civil society, can be applied in Moldova to reinforce societal resilience against hybrid threats, such as disinformation. By fostering multi-sector collaboration, Moldova can develop a more cohesive and informed society capable of resisting external manipulation.

Thus, by integrating archetypes and adapting successful international models, strategic communication can become a powerful tool for enhancing social cohesion and security culture in the Republic of Moldova.

Legislative Measures and Policies Highlighting the Role of Strategic Communication in Security Culture

The Republic of Moldova has developed legislative measures and policies that emphasize the role of strategic communication in strengthening security culture:

- *National Strategy for the Development of the Information Society*—“Digital Moldova 2020”. Regulates the protection of sensitive information and defines measures to prevent cyber threats and unauthorized access to data. Imposes obligations on public institutions and private operators to ensure information security management.
- *Law No. 48 of March 16, 2023, on Cybersecurity*, establishes regulations for the protection of cyber infrastructures. Defines measures for preventing and combating cyberattacks, reinforcing national cybersecurity frameworks.
- *National Defense Strategy of the Republic of Moldova (2024-2034)*. According to Article 3, the government is responsible for monitoring the strategy’s implementation and submitting periodic reports to Parliament. Defines measures for protecting critical infrastructure from cyberattacks. Also, it promotes public awareness about cybersecurity importance. Encourages public-private partnerships to ensure a robust cyber defense.

These policies and legislative frameworks demonstrate Moldova’s commitment to enhancing security culture through strategic communication, public engagement, and institutional cooperation in tackling cyber threats and other security challenges.

The Center for Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation was established to coordinate national efforts in strategic communication and combat disinformation. Its responsibilities include: monitoring the information space to identify disinformation campaigns; developing strategic communication policies to enhance public awareness; collaborating with media institutions and civil society to promote accurate information and counter false narratives.

National Action Plan for Moldova’s EU Accession Criteria. As part of Moldova’s European integration process, the National Action Plan includes measures to: strengthen resilience against disinformation. Promote effective strategic communication aligned with European standards.

These policies reflect Republic of Moldova's commitment to building a comprehensive framework for countering disinformation and ensuring information security through institutional capacity-building and effective strategic communication.

Personal Data Protection Law. This law regulates the collection, processing, and storage of personal data to: prevent misuse and unauthorized access; protect citizens' rights in accordance with international data privacy standards.

By implementing these legislative and institutional measures, Moldova is enhancing its strategic communication capabilities, improving information security, and reinforcing its resilience against external and internal threats.

Educational Programs for Digital Resilience

In the Republic of Moldova, the government, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations, has supported the introduction of media education courses in schools. The aim is to develop critical thinking skills and enhance students' ability to identify unreliable sources of information.

Since April 2017, students in the Republic of Moldova have had the opportunity to study the optional Media Education course. Nearly 12,000 students across all education levels have taken this course. It is taught by over 130 teachers in more than 100 schools. The course is available in both Romanian- and Russian-language institutions. During media education classes, students learn to: think critically and analyze information sources; protect themselves against disinformation and manipulation.

The Independent Journalism Center (CJI) has played a key role in promoting media literacy, by: developing textbooks for different education levels; organizing training programs for teachers; launching the online platform "Educația Mediatică", designed for teachers and students, providing useful resources for teaching and learning media education. Through these initiatives, Moldova is fostering digital resilience, equipping students with the necessary skills to navigate the information landscape safely and responsibly. These measures reflect the Republic of Moldova's commitment to strengthening security culture through a robust legislative framework and policies designed to address contemporary challenges.

The role of strategic communication in shaping security culture is reflected in the planning and implementation of effective communication strategies, where government institutions and civil society can influence attitudes and behaviors. As Raising Awareness: Information campaigns can shift perceptions about certain risks, such as terrorism or cybersecurity threats. Building Resilience: Promoting values like solidarity and collective responsibility can strengthen society's ability to withstand crises. Countering Disinformation: Transparent and proactive communication can reduce the impact of fake news and hostile propaganda. By effectively leveraging strategic communication, Republic of Moldova can enhance national security, reinforce societal cohesion, and develop a more informed and resilient public.

Conclusions

Strategic communication in national security faces a series of complex challenges in the current context of globalization, digitalization, and geopolitical shifts. At the same time, significant opportunities arise that can be leveraged to strengthen security culture and enhance societal resilience. Strategic communication within the security culture framework stands at the intersection of complex and dynamic trends. Challenges such as hybrid threats, technological changes, and societal polarization require innovative and coordinated responses.

Meanwhile, opportunities presented by technology, education, and collaboration can be harnessed to reinforce societal resilience and safeguard democratic values. Success depends on the ability to integrate these elements into a coherent strategy, tailored to the specific context and supported by the commitment of all involved actors. By addressing challenges with insight and creativity and seizing opportunities with determination and collaboration, strategic communication can play a central role in strengthening security culture and ensuring a resilient and prosperous society.

In this context, centralized coordination of strategic communication is essential in managing hybrid threats. Partnerships with non-governmental organizations and independent media can enhance the effectiveness of governmental efforts. Additionally, investing in media literacy is crucial for reinforcing security culture. By promoting narratives that highlight common threats and the importance of solidarity, strategic communication can mobilize citizens in support of security efforts, fostering a more informed, engaged, and resilient society.

The impact of strategic communication on security culture in the Republic of Moldova is significant, yet there remains room for optimization. Investing in media education, leveraging digital technologies, and strengthening interinstitutional cooperation are essential steps toward enhancing societal resilience. By coordinating efforts and adapting messages to the cultural context, Moldova has the potential to become a regional leader in utilizing strategic communication for national security. Key Areas for Development is expanding media education across all age groups to foster critical thinking and digital literacy, and harnessing technology to reach a wider audience through digital platforms and innovative communication strategies. By integrating these approaches, the Republic of Moldova can position itself as a regional model in using strategic communication to strengthen security culture and resilience in the face of emerging threats.

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