O. M. Rudakevych
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0725-6872
Doctor of Political Science, Professor,
Professor at the Department of Political Science and Philosophy named after Serhiy Konoval
Western Ukrainian National University

BLACK PR IN ELECTION CAMPAIGNS: POLITICAL CULTURE AS AN ENVIRONMENT OF ACTION AND A METHODOLOGY FOR STUDYING INFORMATION MANIPULATION

Problem statement. The modern political process is increasingly taking on the features of information competition, in which the main resource is not material, but communicative power. In this context, black PR acts as a tool of destructive influence aimed at forming a distorted image of political opponents, manipulating voters' emotions, and undermining trust in democratic institutions. The problem is complicated by the digitalization of political communications, which creates a favorable environment for the rapid spread of manipulative content through social networks, algorithmic recommendation systems, and artificial intelligence. At the same time, the political culture of society determines the degree of susceptibility to such influences: in democratically mature societies, black PR has a limited effect, while in post-totalitarian or polarized ones, it becomes a systemic tool of political struggle. Thus, a scientific problem arises – to identify the relationship between the characteristics of political culture and the effectiveness of black PR technologies, as well as to develop methodological approaches to identifying and analyzing information manipulation in election campaigns.

Formulation of the purpose of the article. The purpose of the article is to analyze the relationship between the characteristics of political culture and the effectiveness of black PR techniques, as well as to systematize methodological approaches to studying information manipulation in election campaigns.

Analysis of recent research publications. The issue of information manipulation in election processes is the subject of interdisciplinary research by political scientists, sociologists and communicators. Foreign studies focus on the structure and dynamics of black PR as a component of post-truth and digital politics. Thus, Aguiar R. (2025) defines black PR as a system of "semantic traps that replace the semantic content of the message with the emotional reaction of the voter, while Jubba H. (2023) considers it as a derivative of the post-truth phenomenon, in which emotional credibility prevails over factual credibility. C. Gianolla

(2025) emphasizes that black PR is not only a tool of political communication, but also a reflection of the state of political culture, which determines the limits of permissible manipulative influence. Studies by Dom nguez-Garc a et al. (2023) show that in digital campaigns manipulation is reinforced by algorithmic social network systems and microtargeting technologies that use emotionally resonant content to influence voter behavior. The issues of psychological and social conditions for the effectiveness of black PR are analyzed by Jubba, Fernando and Larasati (2023), proving that it has the greatest effect in conditions of low political culture and low media literacy. Ukrainian researchers analyze the concept of political manipulation, in particular Bulgakov D. O. notes that in addition to positive aspects, mass media can be used as a tool of political struggle, where manipulation and propaganda become means of achieving certain goals. Arabadzhiev D. Yu. argues that the modern stage of society's development has increased the tendency to use modern innovative technologies of information influence of a manipulative nature on people's consciousness both in the political process and in everyday life. Comparative European analyses (European Council on Foreign Relations, 2024) indicate that in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, black PR is becoming a normalized part of political culture as a result of the post-totalitarian legacy and ideological polarization. Thus, modern science considers black PR as a complex information and cultural system, the effectiveness of which is determined by a combination of technological, psychological and political factors. However, there is a lack of comprehensive models that integrate the analysis of political culture and digital mechanisms of manipulation, which determines the relevance of further research.

Presentation of the main material of the study. The term black PR (or "black PR") refers to a set of communicative technologies aimed at discrediting an opponent by spreading disinformation, compromising material, distorted facts, or emotionally colored messages [10]. Unlike "white PR," which is based on the open formation of a positive image,

black PR implements hidden mechanisms of manipulation of consciousness, where the main goal is not to inform, but to control the perception of the voter.

As Benaissa-Pedriza, Samia note, the strategy of information manipulation in American electoral discourse consists in creating "semantic traps" – contexts in which the content of the statement is replaced by an emotional reaction [3]. A similar mechanism is described by Jubba H., emphasizing that black PR is a "derivative of post-truth," when the fact loses its self-sufficient meaning, giving way to an impression, emotion, or narrative [10].

The psychological nature of manipulation is closely related to emotional triggers. As Domínguez-García et al. (2023) argue, political communications increasingly appeal to basic emotions – fear, anger and pride – because they are the ones that most effectively influence electoral behavior [5]. Emotional language shapes not only the perception of candidates, but also creates a psychological division of society into "their own" and "theirs".

Black PR is a product of the post-truth era, where reality is replaced by an information construct. Scholar C. Gianolla (2025) notes that post-truth is becoming not only a means of manipulation, but also part of political culture, which determines the way in which political leaders are perceived by society [9]. This phenomenon is reflected in the rhetoric of Trump and Harris, where narratives of pride and national greatness are used as emotional currency to mobilize the electorate.

Researchers identify several key structural elements of black PR: The initiator is a political entity or group that forms a destructive narrative. The mediator is the media or social platform through which information is disseminated. The object of influence is the target audience that perceives information through their own cognitive settings. The tool of influence is emotionally colored messages, memes, manipulative images, "intrusions" and fake documents [4; 9].

As Jubba, Fernando and Larasati (2023) point out, black campaigns have the greatest effect in an environment of low political awareness, when the voter is guided by superficial features – the candidate's appearance, populist slogans or negative images [10]. Thus, black PR is a multi-level phenomenon that combines psychological, communicative and technological aspects. Its effectiveness is explained by the ability to adapt to changes in the information environment and exploit the weaknesses of human perception.

The transition to digital politics has fundamentally changed the structure of electoral communications. If previously the main channel for the dissemination of political messages was the media, now social platforms play a central role, capable of providing instant, targeted and emotionally oriented communication. Aguiar's (2025) study proves that during the 2022 Brazilian elections, artificial intelligence and digital advertising algorithms were used for the automated dissemination of manipulative content, in particular political fakes, which received a higher level of interaction than official news [1].

This process led to the democratization of disinformation: any user can create and distribute fake content without having access to traditional media resources. As Domínguez-García (2023) notes, the era of social media has opened up an "infrastructure of emotional influence" where any user can become an "agent of black PR" through simple reposts, likes, or comments [5]. One of the key mechanisms of modern black PR is algorithmic amplification, the process by which social media systems automatically promote content with high levels of engagement, regardless of its credibility. This creates a paradox: the more emotional and provocative a message is, the more likely it is to be seen by a wide audience. As Benaissa-Pedriza, Samia (2025) note, social media operates a so-called "infrastructure of amplification," where automated bots simulate mass support, thereby increasing the credibility of manipulative messages [3]. For example, in a study by Danial Dengo Ate et al. (2025) showed that in Indonesia in the 2024 elections, up to 38% of political tweets directed against candidates showed signs of automated or coordinated activity [4].

Black PR in the digital age is often implemented through coordinated network campaigns – groups of accounts that publish the same messages or comments in unison, creating the illusion of a mass public reaction. Yang (2025) describes this phenomenon as "orchestrated clusters of disinformation", in which content is distributed according to pre-planned scenarios, which allows for the formation of a virtual majority and shifting public perception of issues [13].

Additionally, such campaigns often use hybrid technologies – a combination of organic users (so-called "soft bots") with professionally managed accounts of political headquarters. As Jubba (2023) emphasizes, it is precisely such structures that create the "social proof effect", when the voter subconsciously perceives a repeated opinion as the truth [10].

Visual culture plays a leading role in modern black PR. Political memes, edited photos, deepfakes and emotional short videos are able to convey complex meanings in a matter of seconds. According to Aguiar's (2025) study, short videos on TikTok and YouTube Shorts had a higher manipulative potential than texts, because they are perceived as "authentic" [1].

Microtargeting technology is especially dangerous, which allows you to customize political advertising based on data on personal preferences, psychological traits or behavioral patterns of voters. According to Aguiar (2025), the combination of AI analytics and big data provides the possibility of individual manipulation of the voter's consciousness through emotionally resonant messages [1]. As Gianolla (2025) argues, this technology not only changes the model of information perception, but also destroys the common public field, fragmenting society into information bubbles [9].

The result of the use of digital mechanisms of black PR is the undermining of trust in democratic institutions. Domínguez-García (2023) emphasizes that manipulative communication causes "emotional fatigue" in voters, who lose the ability to distinguish truth from propaganda [5]. This creates a cycle of distrust in which voters begin to doubt not only politicians, but also the very procedures of democracy.

Political culture acts as a social matrix within which all forms of political communication, including black PR, operate. It is defined as a system of values, norms, beliefs and behavioral patterns that influence citizens' perception of political processes. In countries with a high level of civic culture (participatory political culture), information manipulations tend to be more rapid and their effects are short-lived. In contrast, in countries with a dominant subject or patriarchal culture, manipulative technologies have a lasting and profound impact, as trust in official institutions is low and political apathy is high [16].

Gianolla's (2025) study confirms that the level of emotional identification with political narratives is directly correlated with the type of political culture – in polarized societies, black PR is more effective, as emotions prevail over facts [9].

In Ukraine, the phenomenon of black PR is a systemic feature of election campaigns in recent decades. Its intensity increases during periods of political instability and a decline in trust in government institutions. As noted by Arabadzhiev D. (2020), the Ukrainian information space is characterized by a hybrid media field, where the line between political advertising, journalism and manipulation is often blurred [14]. The use of black PR in the 2019 and 2020 election campaigns was manifested through: the use of botnets to spread disinformation on Facebook and Telegram; manipulation of narratives of "war", "treason" and "oligarchic control"; the creation of pseudo-sociological surveys to legitimize the desired results.

Research by Bulgakov D. (2024) shows that middle-aged voters in regions with a low level of media literacy are most sensitive to black PR, which makes them vulnerable to fake messages [15]. At the same time, the growth of independent media activity and fact-checking initiatives (StopFake, VoxCheck) is gradually strengthening the culture of critical perception of political messages [15].

In most post-Soviet countries, black PR acts as an institutionalized mechanism of the struggle for power, where information manipulation serves as a substitute for open political competition. Jubba's (2023) study indicates that in such systems, black PR is often integrated into state information campaigns, which creates the effect of "managed democracy" [10]. Here, black PR is not only a means of political influence, but also a tool of social mobilization that supports the stability of authoritarian regimes by controlling information flows [10]. Despite the deep integration of manipulation technologies into the electoral process, political culture can act as a mechanism of resistance. According to Gianolla (2025), societies with a developed culture of political dialogue demonstrate a higher ability to self-correct the information environment, where fakes are exposed faster and emotional rhetoric loses its effectiveness [9]. Therefore, the development of media literacy, ethical standards of journalism and civic participation are key conditions for reducing the impact of black PR on the political behavior of citizens.

Methodological understanding of black PR requires a combination of classical political science approaches with modern digital methods of data analysis. The main research problem is to identify hidden manipulative structures in the flows of mass information circulating in the online space. According to Metzler H. et al. (2023), modern electoral manipulations have a hybrid nature – they combine traditional discrediting techniques with algorithmic tools of microtargeting, automated advertising and neural networks that simulate "spontaneous" political activity [11]. This necessitates the use of a multi-level methodology that integrates the cognitive, communication and technological levels of analysis.

Content analysis remains the central tool for studying black PR, as it allows for quantitative and qualitative assessment of information examples in political discourse. The method is used to: identify recurring narratives associated with discrediting opponents; determine the emotional polarity (tonality) of messages; analyze lexical and semantic markers of manipulation (use of offensive epithets, framing, etc.).

Modern research (e.g., Yang, 2025) uses automated content analysis involving Natural Language Processing (NLP) to the importance of the tone of political tweets and posts, which allows us to detect even "subtle" forms of manipulation [13]. One of

the key areas of research into black PR is the identification of network structures for the dissemination of information. Network analysis allows us to determine how fake or manipulative messages circulate in digital environments – through bot networks, coordinated accounts, or influencers. Sociometric methods, in particular graph analysis, reveal "hub-accounts" that generate or amplify black PR messages.

According to a study by Vaccari et al. (2022), in Twitter campaigns related to elections in Europe, coordinated clusters of bots carried out up to 35% of the distribution of negative content [12].

Experimental approaches allow us to assess how black PR affects voter behavior and their attitude towards political actors. Such studies may include: laboratory experiments (e.g., demonstrating different versions of political posts with measuring the reaction); field experiments (observing user behavior on social networks); eye-tracking studies to identify visual triggers in political advertising.

Modern studies demonstrate that the use of AI algorithms allows for the automatic classification of up to 90% of black PR content in election campaigns, based on linguistic and metadata [11]. Another important area is the analysis of metadata (dates of publication, IP addresses, repost patterns), which helps to establish the coordination of information attacks. These methods are integrated into OSINT (Open Source Intelligence) analysis systems used by both the scientific and journalistic communities to detect manipulation.

Research on black PR is associated with ethical challenges, in particular, protecting user privacy and preventing interference in political processes. European standards (GDPR, Digital Services Act 2024) regulate restrictions on the collection of personal data in political research [11].

At the same time, scientists emphasize the importance of transparency of algorithmic methods in order to avoid the creation of a "new form of manipulation" due to the opacity of AI. The optimal methodological model involves the integration of three levels of analysis: Content level – study of messages (vocabulary, tone, frames). Network level – analysis of distribution channels (social networks, bots, media). Cognitive level – study of audience reactions to manipulation. Such a three-component model allows not only to describe the phenomenon of black PR, but also to develop effective strategies for its detection and counteraction [13].

One of the most profound consequences of black PR is the erosion of political culture, which is manifested in the loss of trust of citizens in government institutions, political parties and electoral procedures. The study by Alonzo-Munoz et al. (2020) showed that the systematic use of manipulative technologies in election campaigns reduces trust in the electoral process by 20–30% even among politically active citizens [2].

This is due to the phenomenon of "information cynicism" – the perception of any political communication as potentially false or manipulative. This state of public consciousness undermines the legitimacy of democratic institutions, turning political participation into a formality.

Empirical research conducted in Spain (Dominguez-García, 2023) confirms that an excessive amount of negative content during the election period reduces turnout by 5–8%, especially among young people and new voters [5]. In the US, a similar trend can be observed in the 2024 presidential election, where black PR advertising on TikTok and X (Twitter) was aimed at demobilizing potential voters of opponents [7].

In a systemic dimension, black PR leads to the delegitimization of political institutions. According to the analytical report of Freedom House (2025), countries with a high level of disinformation in electoral processes demonstrate a steady decrease in the democracy index by 0.3–0.5 points every year [6].

This is due not only to manipulation of the electorate, but also to interference in the mechanisms of institutional control – through the financing of botnets, the purchase of media assets and political lobbying. In the global context, black PR is an element of "information authoritarianism" – a system where control over information flows becomes a means of power. As Domínguez-García R., Méndez-Muros S., (2023) emphasize, modern political elites increasingly use manipulation as a substitute for repression, turning public communication into a tool of managed democracy [5].

At the same time, the number of international initiatives to counter it is growing, from the European Code of Ethics for Election Advertising (2024) to the UN Recommendations on Digital Integrity (2025), which call on states to develop legal mechanisms to limit black PR [6].

Research conclusions and prospects for further research in this scientific direction. Black PR in election campaigns is not just a manifestation of unethical political behavior, but a systemic tool of manipulation that undermines the principles of democratic governance. Its main consequences are a decrease in trust in political institutions tutiv, increasing polarization of society and degradation of public discourse. Information technologies and algorithms of social networks create conditions for the rapid spread of disinformation, which enhances the effect of black PR and complicates its detection. The electoral behavior of cit-

izens is changing in two directions: mobilization due to fear and demobilization due to cynicism. The media space is being transformed – journalism is gradually losing its role as a controller, turning into a relay of political attacks. The legitimacy of the authorities in the conditions of black PR is decreasing, and the processes of delegitimization create the basis for the formation of informational and authoritarian practices. To counteract black PR, it is necessary to introduce legal mechanisms for controlling political advertising, support independent fact-checking, develop digital media literacy and intergovernmental cooperation in the field of protecting information integrity.

Bibliography

1. Aguiar R. Artificial intelligence technologies and electoral behavior: A rapid review of the 2022 Brazilian presidential election. ARACÊ. 2025. https://doi.org/10.56238/arev7n7-282

2. Alonso-Muñoz, Laura; Casero-Ripollés, Andreu «Populism against Europe in social media: the eurosceptic discourse on Twitter in Spain, Italy, France, and United Kingdom during the campaign of the 2019 European Parliament election». Frontiers in communication, v. 5. 2020. https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2020.00054

3. Benaissa-Pedriza, Samia. «Sources, channels and strategies of disinformation in the 2020 US election: Social networks, traditional media and political candidates». *Journalism and media*. 2021. 2. 4. 605–624. https://doi.org/10.3390/journalmedia2040036

4. Danial Dengo Ate, Muhammad Ridhwan, Samsul Ode. Social Media-Based Political Campaign Strategies and the Impact of Filter Bubbles and Echo Chambers on the Electability of Presidential Candidates in the 2024 Election in Indonesia. Jurnal Hurriah: Jurnal Evaluasi Pendidikan dan Penelitian Hurriah Journal: *Journal of Educational Evaluation and Research*. 2025. 6. 3 1061–1071 URL: https://academicareview.com/index.php/jh/article/view/288/177

5. Domínguez-García R., Méndez-Muros S., Pérez-Curiel C., Hinojosa-Becerra M. Political polarization and emotion rhetoric in the US presidential transition: A comparative study of Trump and Biden on Twitter and the post-election impact on the public. El Profesional de la Información. 2023. https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2023.nov.06

6. European Commission. *Digital Services Act: Ethical Standards for AI and Political Advertising*. Brussels, 2024. URL: https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu.

7. Freedom House. *Democracy Under Pressure 2025*. Washington, 2025. URL: https://freedomhouse.org.

8. Freelon D., Wells C. Disinformation as Political Communication. Polit. Commun. 2020. 37(2). 145–156 pp. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2020.1723755

9. Gianolla C. Emotion narratives of Trump and Harris disputing US political culture in the 2024 electoral campaign. Emotions and Society. 2025. https://doi.org/10.1332/26316897y2025d000000068

10. Jubba H., Fernando H., Larasati Y. G., Warfete U. *Cues that matter: The potential for black campaigns in the 2024 general election*. Khazanah Sosial. 2023. https://doi.org/10.15575/ks.v5i3.26099

11. Metzler H., Garcia D.. Social drivers and algorithmic mechanisms on digital media. *Perspect. Psychol. Sci*. 2023. 19(5), 735–748 https://doi.org/10.1177/17456916231185057

12. Vaccari C., Chadwick A. Deepfakes and Disinformation: Exploring the Impact of Synthetic Political Video on Deception, Uncertainty, and Trust in News. *Soc. Media Soc.,* 6(1). 2020. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120903408

13. Yang R. The Role of Social MediaAlgorithms in Amplifying Misinformation in Political Elections Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Interdisciplinary Humanities and Communication Studies. 2025. https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7064/2025.29695

14. Арабаджиєв Д. Ю. Політична маніпуляція та інформаційно-психологічна безпека в політичних відносинах. *Політикус : наук. журнал*. 2020. No 2. С. 36–44. URL: http://politicus.od.ua/2_2020/6.pdf

15. Булгаков Д. О. Маніпуляції у мас-медіа як інструмент політичної боротьби. *Політичне життя*. 2024. No 2. С. 131–136. URL: https://doi.org/10.31558/2519-2949.2024.2.174.

16. Рудакевич О. М. Паюк В. Л. Місце і роль соціально-політичної онтології в національній політичній культурі. *Актуальні проблеми філософії та соціології*. 2025. Вип. 52. С. 264–268. URL: http://apfs.nuoua.od.ua/archive/52_2025/38.pdf

Summary

***Rudakevych O. M*. Black PR in election campaigns: political culture as an environment of action and methodology for researching information manipulations.** – Article.

The article examines the phenomenon of black PR as one of the key threats to the democratic development of modern political systems in the digital age. It is proven that the systematic use of manipulative information technologies in election campaigns leads to a decrease in citizens' trust in political institutions, deformation of the public sphere and weakening of social capital. Based on the analysis of the latest research (2022–2025), it was found that black PR increases social polarization, stimulates the emergence of "information cocoons" in social networks and contributes to the formation of the phenomenon of "information cynicism", in which citizens cease to believe in the reliability of any political information. This leads to a demobilization effect – political apathy, alienation from democratic processes and a decrease in voter turnout, especially among young people and citizens with a low level of media literacy. It is shown that the spread of black PR leads to a deformation of journalistic standards, when traditional media lose the function of public control and turn into an instrument of political influence. Particular attention is paid to the consequences of black PR for the legitimacy of political power: increasing distrust in electoral procedures, delegitimization of state institutions, creating an atmosphere of social uncertainty and spreading the practices of "information

authorithianism". The article concludes that effective counteraction to this phenomenon is possible only under the conditions of developing digital media literacy, creating independent fact-checking platforms, introducing international standards for transparency of political advertising and increasing media responsibility for the dissemination of false information.

Key words: black PR, political culture, disinformation, manipulation, democracy, elections, polarization, media.

Анотація

Рудакевич О. М. **Чорний піар у виборчих кампаніях: політична культура як середовище дії та методологія дослідження інформаційних маніпуляцій.** – Стаття.

У статті розглянуто феномен чорного піару як одну з ключових загроз демократичному розвитку сучасних політичних систем у цифрову епоху. Доведено, що систематичне застосування маніпулятивних інформаційних технологій у виборчих кампаніях спричиняє зниження довіри громадян до політичних інститутів, деформацію публічної сфери та послаблення соціального капіталу. На основі аналізу новітніх досліджень (2022–2025 рр.) виявлено, що чорний піар посилює соціальну поляризацію, стимулює появу «інформаційних коконів» у соціальних мережах і сприяє формуванню феномену «інформаційного цинізму», за якого громадяни перестають вірити у достовірність будь-якої політичної інформації. Це зумовлює демобілізаційний ефект – політичну апатію, відчуження від демократичних процесів і зниження явки виборців, особливо серед молоді та громадян із низьким рівнем медіаграмотності. Показано, що поширення чорного піару призводить до деформації журналістських стандартів, коли традиційні медіа втрачають функцію суспільного контролю та перетворюються на інструмент політичного впливу. Особлива увага приділяється наслідкам чорного піару для легітимності політичної влади: посиленню недовіри до виборчих процедур, делегітимації державних інститутів, формуванню атмосфери соціальної невизначеності та поширенню практик «інформаційного авторитаризму». У роботі підкреслено, що чорний піар є не лише технологічним інструментом короткострокової політичної боротьби, а й структурним елементом гібридних політичних режимів, які використовують дезінформацію як інструмент контролю над громадською свідомістю. У статті сформульовано висновок, що ефективна протидія цьому явищу можлива лише за умов розвитку цифрової медіаграмотності, створення незалежних платформ фактчекінгу, запровадження міжнародних стандартів прозорості політичної реклами та підвищення відповідальності медіа за поширення неправдивої інформації.

Ключові слова: чорний піар, політична культура, дезінформація, маніпуляція, демократія, вибори, поляризація, медіа.