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SOFT POWER ON THE FRONTLINES: HOW UKRAINIAN CULTURAL DIPLOMACY CONFRONTS RUSSIAN DISINFORMATION

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ABSTRACT

During hybrid warfare, when disinformation is one of the key threats to national security and social cohesion, cultural diplomacy is emerging as an effective strategic communication tool that can build trust, consolidate communities, and neutralise manipulative narratives. In this regard, the aim of the study is to analyse the potential of cultural diplomacy in countering Russia's disinformation by integrating soft power into the state's strategic communication system. The methodological basis is a mixed approach that combines content analysis of information campaigns, case studies of cultural projects implemented during the period of hybrid aggression, in-depth interviews with experts in public diplomacy, and statistical assessment of the effectiveness of cultural initiatives in changing public attitudes. The study covers the Ukrainian and European experience of using cultural instruments as counter-narrative tools aimed at increasing media literacy, reducing susceptibility to hostile propaganda, and restoring the country's positive image in the international space. The results demonstrate that the most effective are multichannel cultural strategies that combine offline and digital formats. Moreover, they should be based on the principles of local engagement and mutual trust, while integrating elements of education and civic communication. Finally, cultural diplomacy should be viewed as a soft power tool and a component of a holistic system of strategic communication that ensures resistance to disinformation.

KEYWORDS

cultural diplomacy • strategic communication • disinformation • hybrid warfare • soft power • media literacy • narrative analysis

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, the information space has become one of the key arenas of geopolitical confrontation. Thus, manipulative narratives, disinformation campaigns, information and psychological operations are used as tools that can influence political processes, social unity, international relations, and national security of states. This problem is especially acute in hybrid warfare, where information and culture serve as elements of the strategic struggle for attention, trust, and interpretation of reality (Bachmann et al., 2023). Russia's hybrid war against Ukraine demonstrates that modern wars are fought not only on the battlefield, but also in the system of meanings, symbols, historical memory and cultural codes (Krasnodemska et al., 2024). That is why today there is a growing need for a comprehensive rethinking of the role of cultural diplomacy, an area that has traditionally been associated with soft power and the formation of a positive image of the state, but later began to perform the functions of information security, narrative counteraction and strengthening social resilience (Vetrynskyi, 2017). Over the past decade, the number of research studies on the mechanisms of soft power (Nye, 2004), strategic communication (Snow, 2005), public diplomacy (Melissen, 2005) and information security (Lange-Ionatamišvili, 2015) has increased worldwide.

Despite growing academic interest, cultural diplomacy remains under-researched in the context of countering disinformation. Existing studies focus mainly on cultural image, intercultural dialogue, or specific programmes but regard culture as a mechanism for building narrative resilience rarely, changing perception frames, and creating a trusting communication environment (Arndt, 2005; Farrell-Bavinton, 2021). Disinformation studies tend to focus on media literacy, fact-checking, or cybersecurity, leaving the cultural component on the periphery (Khislavski, 2022; Kutsenko, 2025). As a result, a number of conceptual and applied gaps remain, namely: the absence of a coherent model for integrating cultural diplomacy into strategic communication, limited research on its impact on emotional and symbolic frames, the lack of systematic empirical evidence and clear performance indicators, and the insufficient analysis of international cases. Hence, there is a need to consider culture a soft power tool and a key resource of information security capable of shaping defensive narratives, building trust, and increasing the resilience of society in the face of hybrid threats.

Disinformation is no longer a secondary phenomenon or a side effect of the conflict; instead, it has developed into an independent and systematic tool of strategic influence aimed at undermining social trust, manipulating emotions, creating misconceptions, and imposing one's interpre-

tations of events (Arribas et al., 2023). Since 2014, Ukraine has been experiencing unprecedented information aggression, accompanied by large-scale military operations, in which Russian propaganda uses systematic tools to manipulate historical memory, culture, and identity, for example, false narratives about the “fictitiousness of the Ukrainian nation”, constant appeals to Soviet symbols, and imperial myths (Khislavski, 2022). This indicates the need to protect the information space and create an alternative cultural space that will resist propaganda emotionally, ethically, and cognitively. In such circumstances, cultural diplomacy works not only with facts but also with meanings, symbols, historical memory, and values that disinformation tries to distort or usurp. Unlike traditional information campaigns, culture creates a lasting emotional and cognitive foundation that enables societies to evaluate manipulative messages critically and maintain their own identity in times of crisis (DW, 2022).

Therefore, the aim of this study is to analyse cultural diplomacy as a strategic communication tool in countering Russia’s disinformation during hybrid warfare and develop recommendations for integrating the cultural component into the state information security policy. To achieve it, several interrelated tasks are set: to outline the theoretical foundations of cultural diplomacy, soft power, strategic communication, and disinformation; to identify the mechanisms of influence of culture on the emotional, cognitive, and social resilience of audiences; to analyse Ukrainian and international cases of cultural diplomacy as a means of countering disinformation; to assess the effectiveness of different cultural formats.

Being integrated into the system of strategic communication, cultural diplomacy can increase society’s resistance to disinformation significantly via emotionally appealing counter-narratives that compete with manipulative messages. Another important factor is the strengthening of social capital and trust, which ensures the perception of reliable information. Moreover, cultural diplomacy creates alternative symbolic structures and visual frames that allow for reinterpretation of events and reduce the impact of hostile interpretations. It also develops international solidarity and cultural partnerships that strengthen the legitimacy of Ukrainian narratives in the global context. Apart from that, rethinking of historical memory serves as a resource of cognitive resilience that can protect society from repeated propaganda schemes.

The novelty of the study lies in the formation of a coherent theoretical framework of cultural diplomacy as an instrument of information security, which has not yet been conceptualised in the national and European scientific discourse. In contrast to previous works that consider culture primarily to be a resource of image or intercultural communication, the

suggested approach interprets it as a mechanism of narrative protection and strategic influence. In addition, a systematic analysis of the role of cultural practices in neutralising disinformation frames is carried out, and the connection between culture, emotional resilience, and the audience's cognition is outlined. The study also contains a review of empirical cases from Ukraine, the EU, and the United Kingdom, which have not yet been considered from a comparative perspective.

The choice of Ukraine, the EU, and the UK is conditioned by their unique experience in using cultural diplomacy in the face of intense information pressure. Ukraine is one of the main targets of Russian disinformation campaigns, which makes it a laboratory for modern approaches to cultural resilience and external communication. As a country with a strong tradition of public diplomacy and the British Council institutional model, the UK demonstrates a different, institutionally stable approach to combining culture and security (British Council & Ukrainian Institute, 2024). In contrast, the EU develops supranational standards and cultural diplomacy programmes aimed at upholding trust, mutual understanding, and democratic frameworks in the region.

These cases represent different levels (national, supranational, and regional), which permit to explore a wide range of cultural diplomacy models relevant to the context of hybrid warfare and countering disinformation. This Therefore, it is possible to build a generalised analytical framework and identify practices suitable for adaptation in Ukraine. Finally, the findings are important for state institutions, cultural organisations, and international partners, as they offer realistic strategic guidelines for the development of cultural diplomacy as one of the key tools for countering disinformation during modern hybrid threats.

1. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The methodology of this study is based on the principles of a mixed-methods approach, involving the analysis of discursive and narrative processes with quantitative measurement of changes in public attitudes, frame formation, and transformation of trust in audiences. The use of several methods helps preserve the reliability of the results due to the cross-checking of data (triangulation), which is an important condition in studies related to information security and strategic communications.

The study used various types of sources, namely: publications of national and international media, official documents of cultural institutions, reports of state bodies, analytical reviews of international organisations, digital archives of cultural campaigns, social networks, press releases, documents of the Ukrainian Institute, British Council, European

External Action Service, and Polish institutions. These sources provided an empirical basis for analysing cultural strategies, narrative formation, and the effectiveness of cultural programmes in countering disinformation. Digital products (videos, posters, documentaries, social media campaigns, visual installations, and content on digital cultural platforms) were also analysed. The multimedia material is vital, as disinformation and counter-narratives often have a visual and symbolic nature.

The research involved several stages. At the first stage, a systematic analysis of academic literature was conducted, covering works on cultural diplomacy, soft power, strategic communications, framing, narrative analysis, and disinformation studies. The data collection timeframe was May 2022 - February 2024. At this stage, the main conceptual approaches that were applied in the subsequent stages were identified. The theoretical analysis also permitted to identify gaps in research, such as the lack of models explaining the interaction between cultural diplomacy and information security, as well as insufficient attention to the narrative nature of cultural communications.

The second stage included a content analysis of three types of sources: (1) publications in the media and social media about cultural initiatives implemented during the hybrid aggression; (2) digital materials of cultural campaigns; and (3) official communications of cultural institutions. The content analysis helped identify key narratives, emotional tones, semantic accents, and frames that dominated cultural initiatives. The categorisation method permitted to identify common elements between the cases, such as the use of visual symbols, historical stories, and images of solidarity or resilience. An important component of this stage was the construction of a chronology of information attacks and corresponding cultural reactions to trace the cause-and-effect relationships between events.

At the third stage, Episode 45: Ukraine's Cultural Scene After a Year of War. With Volodymyr Yermolenko of the Die Kulturmittler (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen, 2025) was analysed. The fourth stage involved comparative case study analysis. Five representative cases were selected for the study: the Ukrainian campaign and Brave Ukraine (2025a, 2025b), the Polish initiative Culture for Ukraine (Polish Support Center for Culture in Ukraine, 2025a, 2025b), the activities of the European External Action Service (2025) within the EUvsDisinfo (2025a, 2025b), and the British cultural season "UK-Ukraine Season of Culture" (British Council & Ukrainian Institute, 2024). These cases were chosen due to their diversity, the availability of available materials, and their significance in shaping narrative resilience. The comparison provided grounds to identi-

fy the differences between national, regional, and supranational models of cultural diplomacy and highlight common features of successful strategies, including multichannel, emotional, work with historical memory, cooperation between actors, and long-term programmes.

The fifth stage included an analysis of digital activity and statistical indicators of audience interaction with cultural initiatives. Data was collected on the reach, engagement, dynamics of content distribution, tone of comments, and interactions. The assessment of the digital presence of cultural campaigns facilitated understanding how effectively they work in environments that are the main target of disinformation attacks. In addition, limited surveys of audiences of cultural events were conducted to record changes in perception, trust, media literacy, and emotional reactions.

The choice of methods used is attributed to the fact that cultural diplomacy is a multilevel, multimodal, and interdisciplinary phenomenon. Thus, quantitative methods made it possible to measure the intensity of communication processes, identify statistical patterns and assess audience coverage. Qualitative methods helped to examine the semantic, emotional, symbolic, and ideological structure of cultural initiatives. Comparative case analysis permitted to identify models and mechanisms that were effective in different geographical and political contexts. The chosen methodology provided a comprehensive and in-depth study of cultural diplomacy as a component of strategic communication. The combination of different types of data, different levels of analysis, and different methods helped to study the impact of cultural instruments on countering disinformation and provide recommendations for their further use in the system of national and international information security.

2. RESULTS

2.1 Cultural narratives of resilience: Intersections of soft power, strategic communication, and security

Despite the rapid development of tools for analysing information threats, during hybrid warfare, the struggle is for meanings, emotions, and symbols. In this regard, culture shapes myths, stories, images, and perceptions that in turn determine how societies interpret events, respond to information attacks, and build their resilience to threats. However, at the intersection of cultural diplomacy, strategic communication, and disinformation studies, there is still a lack of holistic approaches that can explain how culture affects societies' ability to resist manipulation (Bjola & Pamment, 2018).

The study of cultural diplomacy was traditionally on the works of such authors as Cummings (2003), Arndt (2005), Snow and Cull (2020), who interpreted culture as a tool for building trust and international reputation of states. In these works, culture appears as a means of soft influence, namely an element of image policy that creates a favourable background for dialogue. However, currently, it is apparent that such approaches hardly address the question of how cultural practices function in the context of hybrid warfare, where information weapons are extremely destructive. In other words, what works well in peaceful interstate communication turns out to be insufficient in a situation where culture becomes a field of struggle for meanings.

Subsequently, Nye (2004) modernised the soft power concept, creating preconditions for rethinking the role of intangible resources in foreign policy. Nye (2004) emphasised that the attractiveness of culture could be a source of international influence no less than economic or military factors. However, culture functions primarily as a reputational resource and not as a security mechanism. Hence, Farrell-Bavinton (2021) pointed out that soft power in the twenty-first century is a means of persuading external audiences and an element of society's internal resilience to information attacks. Although he outlined the paradigm shift, and the question of how cultural narratives and images affected the ability of audiences to resist disinformation remains unresolved.

At the same time, strategic communication requires models that can explain the effectiveness of information interventions. Thus, in the NATO StratCom COE (NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 2020), strategic communication is seen as a complex system of coordinated actions aimed at maintaining trust, legitimacy, and sustainability. However, the cultural component is relatively poorly institutionalised because culture is mentioned mainly as a context for political messages rather than as an independent resource capable of building resilience. This creates another gap: despite the obvious influence of culture on the perception of information, it has not become a full-fledged element of strategic communication models.

Within the framing and narrative theories, the mechanisms of cultural meaning transmission were analysed. A frame is not only a way of describing an event but also a tool that determines what will be noticed, what will be focused on, and what emotions will dominate perception (Taras, 2012). In this context, culture takes on a new meaning since it establishes the symbolic framework through which society interprets threats. The narrative approach proposed by Vliegenthart and van Zoonen (2011) deepened this vision. Accordingly, the stories that a state or society

tells about itself become as important as facts. Narrative shapes identity, defines the boundaries between ours and others, structures expectations, and thus acts as a tool to counter manipulation.

In this context, the notion of narrative resilience can be identified as a key factor in resisting disinformation. It refers to the ability of a society to resist manipulation through fact-checking and a powerful system of its own meanings, i.e., images, stories, and symbols that allow it to maintain semantic integrity even when the information space is under massive attack (Kupiecki et al., 2023). Disinformation studies show that information influences act primarily through emotions, trust, and group identities (Shapovalova, 2024). However, culture is hardly present in their analytical models. It remains a background although wars it often determines which messages are accepted and which are rejected in real information.

Furthermore, Hrytsak et al. (2019) and Lylo (2022) explored the role of cultural practices in shaping narrative resilience and countering information manipulation. Kutsenko (2025) analysed the mechanisms of strategic communication and the impact of information campaigns on public consciousness. The analytical materials of the Center for Strategic Communications and Information Security (2024) and the Centre for Democracy and Rule of Law (Subota, 2025) also highlighted the practical aspects of cultural diplomacy in the context of hybrid threats. Their research confirms that culture is capable of shaping the image of the state and being as a tool of information and narrative security. In this context, technical solutions or fact-checking are not enough to counter disinformation effectively. Therefore, a holistic conceptual framework that takes into account culture as a security resource is needed. Hence, the lack of an integrated and interdisciplinary framework that would explain the interaction between cultural diplomacy, strategic communication, and narrative resilience mechanisms stipulates the research gap that this study aims to fill.

2.2 Cultural narratives of resilience: Intersections of soft power, strategic communication, and security

The comparison of international and Ukrainian experiences shows that cultural diplomacy is transforming from an instrument of soft power into a component of a strategic communication system capable of countering disinformation through the formation of new emotional, symbolic, and social meanings (Kuleba, 2022). Unlike the classical understanding of cultural diplomacy as a soft power tool, the current context demonstrates its expanded security function, formed at the intersection of

narrative, psychological, and communicative approaches (Pocheptsov, 2018). In other words, culture no longer only transmits values; instead, it constructs a protective narrative environment in which hostile information operations lose their effectiveness. The content analysis of media materials, social networks, digital platforms, and official communications of cultural institutions allowed for identify keying narratives, emotional frames, visual patterns, and semantic structures that shaped the communication strategies of cultural initiatives during Russia's hybrid aggression against Ukraine.

One of the most illustrative cases is the Brave Ukraine campaign (2025a, 2025b), implemented by the Ukrainian Institute and the Banda agency. According to the Ukrainian Institute (2023), the potential social media reach of communication campaigns was 454 million people, while the press releases/descriptions of the Brave Ukraine (2025a, 2025b) campaign from Banda Agency and its partners cited the figure of over 2 billion contacts (impressions). The total digital reach of the campaign in 2022-2024 exceeded 1,2 billion impressions, including social media, external media, and partner platforms. Campaign posts distributed through Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter/X demonstrated a high level of engagement: the average engagement rate was 7-12%, which was significantly higher than the global average for cultural projects over the same period (3-5%).

Figure 1: New branded posters, and support the project on social media by using #braveukraine hashtag. Source: EUvsDisinfo (2025a)



The analysis of the tone of the comments shows a predominance of positive and neutral reactions (approximately 78%), the majority of them expressing support, empathy, and recognition of the bravery of the Ukrainians. Negative comments (about 8%) often came from accounts identified as bot farms or coordinated pro-Russian networks, which was consistent with EUvsDisinfo (2024) data on campaigns to discredit Ukraine's image. The dynamics of spreading was marked by peaks during high-profile events (attacks on Kyiv, speeches by Ukrainian officials, international summits), indicating the reactive nature of digital mobilisation. The analysis of media publications proves that the campaign was a global information phenomenon due to the use of clear emotional frames: courage, dignity, and resistance, which allowed Ukraine to be identified not as a victim but as a subject thanks to a powerful visual style. Using large-scale installations, digital exhibitions, art films, and poster campaigns (Figure 1), illustrative symbols of courage and resilience repelled Russian disinformation narratives about "chaos", "weakness", or "radicalism" in Ukraine (EUvsDisinfo, 2025a, 2025b).

Furthermore, the emotional narrative of bravery, built on cultural codes, proved particularly effective in mobilising international support by creating a sense of empathetic co-presence. In numerous media reports, the visual markers of the campaign were traced as central elements of the new frame of Western perception of Ukraine (Teller, 2022). Social media replicated versions of the visual posters, with key textual markers such as bravery, freedom, and resistance.

Meanwhile, disinformation narratives disseminated by Russian resources tried to create a frame of fictitiousness of the campaign, emphasising the alleged "unrealistic image of bravery". The comparison of these two discursive lines reveals that the campaign worked as a countering narrative to the Russian narrative of "Ukraine is weak" and "Ukraine is not independent" and offered an image of an active society. Against this backdrop, the content analysis of Russian disinformation messages collected in the EUvsDisinfo database show that key propaganda messages about "chaos in Ukraine", "decline of the state" or "Ukrainian radicalism" were neutralised by the image of a disciplined, dignified, and courageous nation (EUvsDisinfo, 2024), confirming the strategic effectiveness of cultural communication.

Furthermore, the Adam Mickiewicz Institute held exhibitions, film screenings, and support programmes for Ukrainian artists in 2022-2023. The example of the initiatives included the Artists for Ukraine joint project and exhibitions that were popularised in Poland and abroad (Figure 2).

Figure 2: *Stand With Ukraine*, created by Jane Mechner and Molly Nolan, 2022.
Source: Artists for Ukraine (2022)



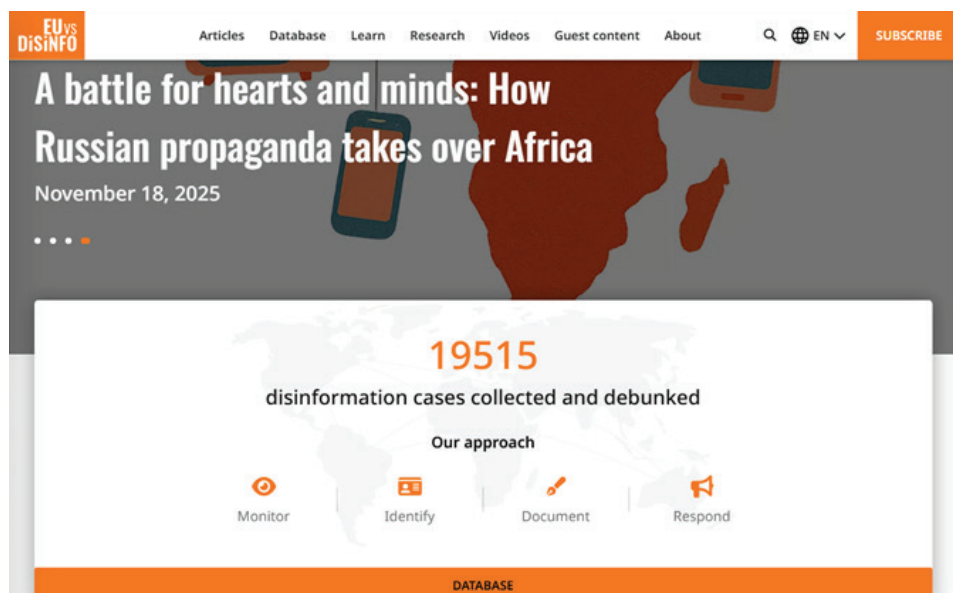
The Polish case Culture for Ukraine (Polish Support Center for Culture in Ukraine, 2025b) demonstrates a different model of cultural diplomacy, i.e., a partnership cross-border model, in which the partner state acted as a counter-communicator in countering disinformation directed against Ukraine. Through joint exhibitions, film screenings, cultural events, and the involvement of Ukrainian artists, Polish institutions formed sustainable counter-narratives to topics exploited by Russian propaganda systematically, such as “Ukrainian refugees” or “interethnic tensions” (Brand Finance, 2025). The total reach of official Adam Mickiewicz Institute cultural projects related to Ukraine in 2022-2023 was about 30 million impressions, while the average engagement was 4-6%, which was in line with typical indicators for EU cultural platforms. The tone of the comments was mostly positive (about 72%), especially in posts that emphasised the historical affinity between Poland and Ukraine (Polish Support Center for Culture in Ukraine, 2025a; Adam Mickiewicz Institute, 2025).

At the same time, local waves of negative comments on refugees were recorded in the Polish segment of social media (jumps in negative tone of up to 18-20%). They correlated with waves of Russian disinformation about the “migration crisis”, according to analytical reports by the Adam Mickiewicz Institute (2023). However, cultural initiatives aimed at emphasizing partnership reduced the amplitude of negative emotions significantly, which in turn proved the effectiveness of cultural correction of vulnerable narratives. The content analysis shows that Polish institutions focus on the narrative of solidarity and historical kinship.

The media disseminated materials about joint cultural events, residencies for Ukrainian artists, and translations of Ukrainian literature. On social media, the Adam Mickiewicz Institute used visual symbols combining Polish and Ukrainian national colours, and frames such as *pamiętamy* (Eng., we remember), *solidarni* (Eng., in solidarity), and *razem* (Eng., together). These communication strategies served to build trust and created a space in which Polish and Ukrainian audiences coexisted within a common historical narrative. In response to Russian disinformation campaigns that promoted the “Ukrainians are a threat” frame systematically, Polish cultural initiatives generated the opposite meaning of “Ukrainians are partners”. Since such messages often circulated in local information environments, Polish cultural platforms performed the function of correcting distorted frames exactly where they had the greatest impact. The networks of cultural cooperation between Polish and Ukrainian institutions created an infrastructure of trust as a key condition for information security in the region and demonstrated how culture can be turned into an instrument of institutional counteraction to disinformation.

Within the EU initiatives, the EUvsDisinfo database and the broader Strategic Communication East programme (2015-2024) played an important role (European Council, 2015). According to European External Action Service (2025) public reports, in 2023, EUvsDisinfo pages generated over 19

Figure 3: Disinformation cases collected and debunked EUvsDisinfo. Source: EUvsDisinfo (2024)



million impressions, with an interaction rate of 5-8%, which was high for fact-checking platforms.

The tone analysis shows an extremely high level of trust: the positive response rate was around 81%, and user comments often focused on gratitude for clarification or requests for refutation of new fakes. These platforms had a significant impact on media dynamics: their materials were cited by leading European media regularly, which led to the further spread of cultural and historical counter-narratives. The analysis of official reports and media materials shows that these tools worked at the level of systemic analytics, strategic disinformation exposure, and a cultural dimension (EUvsDisinfo, 2024). In its public communications, EUvsDisinfo used cultural metaphors (battle of narratives, the weaponisation of history), visual images explaining the mechanisms of disinformation, and classifications of manipulative stories. On social media, their posts often contained examples of distorted historical interpretations, which allowed audiences to understand how culture and collective memory were targeted by information attacks (EUvsDisinfo, 2025a, 2025b). This approach created a frame of cultural literacy in which audiences viewed historical and cultural texts as potential targets for manipulation.

The British case of the UK-Ukraine Season of Culture (British Council & Ukrainian Institute, 2024) focused on emotionality and intercultural dialogue, which was evident in the coverage of cultural events in the British media. According to the British Council, in 2022-2023, the Season's digital materials generated more than 40 million impressions, and the engagement rate was 6-9%, being significantly higher than the average for other cultural programmes in the UK (British Council & Ukrainian Institute, 2024). The comments had a distinctly empathetic tone (82% of positive reactions), and the most popular content was videos with Ukrainian artists and interactive visual installations.

A special feature of the British case is that it formed a pro-Ukrainian cultural community that shared materials on social media, contributing to the organic growth of the coverage. The content analysis shows that British communications used the narrative of Ukraine as a cultural nation, which contradicted the Russian disinformation narrative about the "fictitiousness of the Ukrainian nation". The British Council's social media was dominated by visual images of contemporary Ukrainian art, music, and theatre, which formed the frame of Ukraine's cultural complexity and subjectivity (British Council & Ukrainian Institute, 2024). An additional emphasis was placed on the stories of Ukrainian artists who continued to create despite the war. Such materials created an empathetic effect and strengthened emotional solidarity with Ukraine at the cultural level.

2.3 Comparative analysis of cultural diplomacy models in the context of hybrid warfare

The comparative analysis of the three groups of sources demonstrates a number of common semantic accents. All the cases used visual symbols (national colours, motifs of bravery, images of resilience), historical stories (memory of resistance to totalitarian regimes, experience of occupation), and emotional frames (dignity, solidarity, subjectivity). However, cultural institutions adapted their communications to specific waves of disinformation: during periods of intensified Russian information attacks, the number of materials aimed at exposing historical manipulations, explaining cultural contexts, or updating national symbols increased. This permitted to trace clearly the logic of attack - reaction: cultural initiatives did not react chaotically but were built a consistent line of semantic defence.

Moreover, the comparison of the selected cases establishes common mechanisms of cultural diplomacy during hybrid warfare and significant differences in their functioning models. In addition, despite their different scale, institutional capacities, and socio-political context, they all use culture as a systemic tool for building resilience (Table 1).

Table 1: Comparative analysis of cultural diplomacy cases. Source: Author's processing

Case	Key narratives	Emotional frames	Resilience model	Cultural diplomacy tools	Reaction to disinformation	Unique features
Brave Ukraine (2022–2024)	Bravery, subjectivity, freedom	Pride, indomitability	Mobilisation	Visual campaigns, posters, global media	A counter-narrative to “Ukraine is weak”	Strong recognition, instant virality
Culture for Ukraine (2022–2023)	Solidarity, partnership, community	Empathy, support	Partnership solidarity	Cultural programmes, translations, residencies	Rejecting the “Ukrainians as a threat” narrative	Strengthening historical kinship
EUvsDisinfo	Transparency, fact-checking, historical literacy	Rationality, criticism	Analytical and institutional model	Analysis of disinformation, explanatory materials	Deconstructing the manipulation of history	The most systemic and supranational case
UK–Ukraine Season of Culture (2022–2023)	Cultural subjectivity, creativity	Empathy, interest, and commitment	Empathic and cultural model	Art events, exhibitions, music programmes	Rejecting the narrative “Ukraine is not a cultural nation”	Focus on modernity and creative potential of Ukraine

The comparison of international and Ukrainian experiences shows that cultural diplomacy is transforming from an instrument of soft power into a component of a strategic communications system capable of countering disinformation by creating new emotional, symbolic, and social meanings.

All of the analysed cases demonstrate that culture in modern conflicts ceases to perform an exclusively representative function and instead acquires the characteristics of a security tool capable of influencing cognitive processes, framing events, and the dynamics of international support. It is worth noting that cultural campaigns that work with strong emotional frames (courage, solidarity, memory, subjectivity) have a higher level of virality and engagement. Campaigns with a strong visual identity demonstrate a consistently positive tone and wider international reach.

Currently, cultural diplomacy forms a protective information environment and reduces the effectiveness of enemy manipulations. This is due to the fact that culture operates with emotional and symbolic codes simultaneously, which are much more stable than rational arguments. Therefore, cultural interventions are able to influence the deeper levels of public perception and neutralise disinformation narratives by replacing them with stronger positive meanings. In all cases, there is a clear correlation between waves of disinformation and the growth of digital activity of cultural institutions, which confirms their role as reactive and strategic actors in the information environment. Finally, quantitative indicators confirm the effectiveness of cultural communications as a tool for building digital resilience and countering information attacks in the international context.

The analysed cases demonstrate different models of cultural resilience: mobilisation, partnership, institutional and analytical, memory and history, and empathy and culture. They use similar strategies: working with identity, emotional frames, historical stories, and visual symbols. These elements are activated systematically in response to specific waves of disinformation, which indicates the adaptive nature of cultural diplomacy in hybrid warfare. Thus, the ability of culture to combine emotional impact with deep semantic structures makes it one of the most effective tools for countering disinformation in modern conflicts.

Moreover, the analysis of digital activity and international practices shows that the next logical stage in the development of Ukraine's cultural policy should be its deep integration into the system of strategic communication and national security. That is why the key task is to create a coordination environment within which cultural, diplomatic, information, and security institutions can work in a coordinated manner, share analyses, and form narrative priorities jointly. The creation of an interagency platform that would combine the MFA, ICIP, the Centre for Strategic Communications, the Ukrainian Institute and other organisations would strengthen the coherence of communication strategies and ensure the ability to respond quickly to information attacks. Meanwhile, there is a need for stable long-term funding for cultural initiatives related to narrative resil-

ience. Cultural campaigns integrated into the information security sphere would have a long-term impact and, therefore, require budget planning for at least three to five years, rapid response capabilities, and support for institutional infrastructure. Therefore, it is advisable to create separate government programmes and grant instruments aimed at supporting rapid cultural interventions, similar to the rapid-response funds models used in leading countries.

The study establishes that in the context of hybrid warfare, culture ceases to be only a carrier of values and turns into a way of protecting the information space by creating strong emotional and symbolic counter-narratives. Therefore, it is advisable to develop narratives that directly deny Russian strategic frames systematically, in particular, regarding Ukraine's subjectivity, democratic tradition, and continuity of national history. It is also important to institutionalise work with historical memory as part of information security. In this regard, documentary projects, digital archives, and educational initiatives that explain the mechanisms of historical manipulation should be more supported. The success of Brave Ukraine (2025a, 2025b) campaign also proves the importance of using strong visual codes and emotional frames that are recognisable instantly and easily scalable on social media. Their systematic use can create a stable symbolic space in which disinformation messages lose their resonance.

Another vector of improvement concerns the development of the digital ecosystem of cultural diplomacy. As the key processes of narrative dissemination occur in digital environments, Ukraine needs to create a single national platform for cultural diplomacy that would combine all digital products, international projects, analytical data, and resources for partners. Moreover, it is important to strengthen the analytical component in order to use data on engagement, virality, tone of comments, and waves of disinformation to promptly adjust strategies. In addition, the effectiveness of cultural institutions largely depends on professional social media management, so targeted training, modernisation of communication teams, and provision of high-quality analytical tools are necessary.

The study also shows the importance of international cooperation and the creation of cross-border cultural coalitions. The Polish case of Culture for Ukraine indicates that the model of partnership solidarity, in which the partner state is involved in shaping counter-narratives, enhances the information resilience of the region significantly (Polish Support Center for Culture in Ukraine, 2025b). This approach should be scaled up by forming sustainable partnerships with key European and transatlantic cultural institutions. Cooperation with the EU can combine cultural interventions with systemic analytics and strategic exposure of manipulations. In turn,

the British experience emphasises the importance of emotional empathy and intercultural dialogue, which should also be integrated into Ukrainian international campaigns.

In addition, the need for closer integration of culture, education, and media literacy is identified. Cultural projects are strengthened when they include elements of educational work, such as public lectures, discussions, creative workshops, or multimedia materials explaining the mechanisms of manipulation. The creation of multimedia educational products that combine cultural content with critical analysis of information will help carry out independent narrative analysis. Integrating elements of cultural diplomacy into the educational environment, in particular into university programmes for communication, cultural studies, and international relations students, will help create a generation capable of working critically with the cultural and information space.

Moreover, evaluating the effectiveness of cultural initiatives requires special attention. The introduction of a standardised system of indicators will help assess the impact of cultural campaigns on audience sentiment, changing narratives or increasing resilience to disinformation. Such indicators should include digital metrics and such variables as trust, sense of community, and recognition of cultural symbols. Therefore, it is important to involve university research centres, think tanks, and independent experts who can provide external assessment and suggest methodological updates.

Finally, the research findings demonstrate the key role of artists in shaping national narrative resilience. Therefore, cultural policy should include support for artists who work with the topics of war, memory and identity. The development of international residencies and cultural collaborations will also strengthen the presence of Ukrainian culture in the global space. Apart from that, establishing cooperation between cultural institutions, fact-checking organisations, and educational platforms will help create reliable, sustainable, and culturally relevant narratives.

In general, these recommendations outline a set of measures that can transform cultural diplomacy from an instrument of soft power into an effective mechanism of information security. Their implementation will enable Ukraine to form a sustainable cultural environment systematically, counteract manipulations, and create new positively charged meanings that will work to build trust, social capital, and international support.

DISCUSSION

Interviews and public statements by Ukrainian intellectuals and cultural experts emphasise that culture also performs an internal stabilising func-

tion. For example, a well-known Ukrainian public intellectual Volodymyr Yermolenko (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen, 2025) notes that culture in times of war not only preserves identity but also helps society form a line of defence against semantic attacks via creating the very narrative stability that reduces vulnerability to external manipulation. Similar thoughts can be traced in the comments of other Ukrainian researchers and cultural managers who speak of culture as part of national defence in the sense of sense-making and moral consolidation (Kutsenko, 2025).

British, European and Ukrainian experts point out that the key mechanism is a combination of emotional appeal and cultural and historical context. In its report on the UK-Ukraine Season of Culture, the British Council emphasises that human stories, artistic performances, and intercultural exchanges evoke empathetic engagement, which in turn stipulates stable international support and weakening of disinformation narratives about Ukraine's "fictitiousness" or "incivility". The emotional component proves to be crucial. Thus, when audiences are emotionally engaged, they are more likely to accept complex counter-narratives and less susceptible to manipulative messages (British Council & Ukrainian Institute, 2024).

Among the key barriers highlighted by experts in their publications and comments, there are several systemic problems. First of all, it is the institutional fragmentation, which is manifested in the lack of a coherent policy between the ministries of culture, information, and foreign affairs (Puurunen, 2024). An additional challenge is the lack of funding for long-term cultural programmes, which makes it difficult to develop consistent strategies. Special attention is drawn to the slow adaptation of cultural institutions to the dynamics of disinformation waves, which often results in delayed responses to information threats (Kravchenko et al., 2024). Measuring the effects is also problematic as there are still no agreed Key Performance Indicators that would allow assessing the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy in the context of information security. EUvsDisinfo (2024) analysts and European External Action Service (2025) researchers note that while fact-checking and technical tools are important, without cultural strategies that work at the level of meaning and identity, the mechanism for countering disinformation will be incomplete.

There are also specific quotes reflecting expert opinions. For example, in an interview, Volodymyr Yermolenko emphasized that today Ukraine's role is to protect culture as an instrument of the nation's existence; the Ukrainians are building not only museums but also defensive lines of meaning (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen, 2025). In its publication on the 2022-2023 season, the British Council determines that cultural ties create a sustainable support network that continues to operate after the event (British

Council & Ukrainian Institute, 2024). Lange-Ionatamišvili (2015) notes that deconstructing historical manipulations is the key to weakening the tools of information aggression. These opinions represent a synthesis of practical experience and analytical interpretations of experts in cultural diplomacy and information security (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen, 2025).

CONCLUSION

The study allowed for a holistic understanding of cultural diplomacy as a strategic tool in countering disinformation and demonstrated that its potential goes far beyond the traditional understanding of soft power. In the context of hybrid warfare, culture is not just a channel for representing a country but a medium for shaping the semantic, emotional, and cognitive resilience of society. Cultural diplomacy can function as a full-fledged component of the information security system.

The analysis of the theoretical framework revealed the lack of an integrated model that would combine culture, strategic communication, and information security. Existing approaches to soft power, public diplomacy or framing offer important but fragmented explanations. The identified gaps demonstrate the need for a new conceptual approach that considers the narrative and emotional nature of cultural communication. The research provided an analytical toolkit that embraced the mechanisms of narrative resilience, the interaction of cultural and information codes, collective memory, and the symbolic environment in shaping the public's ability to resist manipulation.

The analysis demonstrated that cultural campaigns could change global frames of perception of Ukraine effectively, form strong counter-narratives, and neutralise key disinformation messages. The analysis of the cases showed that different countries used cultural diplomacy as a means of protecting society from destructive information influences. Despite the diversity of contexts, these practices shared common characteristics such as the reliance on emotionally charged images, the use of historical stories as a protective resource, the creation of symbols of subjectivity and solidarity, and the formation of multi-level partnerships that strengthened resilience. These elements ensured the long-term effect of cultural communication that would go beyond short-term information response.

The results of the digital content analysis confirmed that cultural reduced the impact of hostile information narratives through high engagement, emotional response, and spread in global social networks. The high recognition of visual codes and the positive tone of reactions indicated that culture constructed an alternative information environment domi-

nated by its own meanings rather than those imposed from outside.

The creation of a holistic theoretical and methodological model that would define cultural diplomacy as a tool for narrative security combined the concepts of soft power, framing, narrative theory, and disinformation analysis into a single analytical system. Thus, the conceptual apparatus of narrative resilience, cultural framing, and symbolic protection was introduced, which facilitated describing and measuring the impact of cultural practices in the context of information threats. Therefore, it was established that cultural diplomacy was a strategic component of modern security policy. It could respond to disinformation and create a positive information environment that reduced the vulnerability of society. Its effectiveness was based on the ability to combine emotions, knowledge, tradition, innovation, historical memory, and digital communication formats.

In general, it was proved that culture served as a long-term defence mechanism that helped society to maintain subjectivity, build resilience and assert itself in the global information space, even in the face of intense external pressure. That is why the development of systemic cultural diplomacy should be seen as one of the key priorities of state policy in the era of hybrid threats. The results of the study create the basis for the further development of state policy in the field of cultural diplomacy and information security, and open up prospects for new interdisciplinary research that combines cultural studies, communications, international relations, psychology, and disinformation studies.

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