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# A STUDY ON NORTH KOREA'S NEW MEDIA PROPAGANDA STRATEGY: FOCUSING ON 'DPRK TODAY' INSTAGRAM CHANNEL

**Jungyoon Kim**

**Master's Dissertation**

University of North Korean Studies

**June 2024**

# A STUDY ON NORTH KOREA'S NEW MEDIA PROPAGANDA STRATEGY: FOCUSING ON 'DPRK TODAY' INSTAGRAM CHANNEL

by

**Jungyoon Kim**

**Master's Dissertation**

**Directed by Professor Kim Jung**

Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree
of Master of Arts in North Korean Studies
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COMMITTEE APPROVAL
of a Master's Dissertation submitted by
***Jungyoon Kim***

**A Study on North Korea's New Media Propaganda Strategy:**
**Focusing on 'DPRK Today' Instagram Channel**

This submission has been read and approved by all members of the dissertation committee.

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**June 2024**

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ABSTRACT

# A STUDY ON NORTH KOREA'S NEW MEDIA PROPAGANDA STRATEGY: FOCUSING ON 'DPRK TODAY' INSTAGRAM CHANNEL

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This thesis delves into the strategic evolution of North Korean propaganda, examining its embrace and adept use of social media channels, with a focus on the DPRK Today Instagram page[1] - a key facet of North Korea's media landscape under Kim Jong-un's regime since 2016. The study is particularly salient, given the deteriorating state of North Korea's external propaganda amidst a backdrop of stringent

[1] North Korean Instagram http://instagram.com/dprktoday. At the time of the study, the channel was open, but it was shut down in mid-January, 2024 along with other North Korean websites and social media channels

international sanctions it faces recently. Historically, the regime has fortified its internal narrative with ideologically charged propaganda, while maintaining a relative seclusion from global media discourse or external propaganda. However, recent years have shown North Korea's active foray into digital media scene open to international audience. This turning point is not simply technological; it represents a profound strategic realignment in the face of global digitisation and a changing geopolitical environment.

The main objective of this research is to uncover the multifaceted aspects of North Korea's digital propaganda strategy through the prism of 'DPRK Today' Instagram page. The study elucidates clear distinctions between North Korea's traditional and digital (or social media) propaganda efforts in their thematic contents, targeted audiences, strategies, goals and effectiveness. Employing a blend of quantitative and qualitative analysis such as text mining, topic modelling, sentiment analysis, and comparative studies, this research scrutinises the strategic narratives North Korea projects internationally on the social media channel.

The findings reveal a striking dichotomy in the portrayal of North Korean propaganda. The regime's digital propaganda efforts are meticulously crafted to depict North Korea as a "normal state" with North Korean people enjoying burgeoning economy and advanced technologies

despite a series of U.S. sanctions that are widely expected to have had a negative impact on North Korea. Also, the core contents omitting praising the leader, in stark contrast with the traditional media attempts to erase the reclusive, authoritarian image historically attributed to it. This juxtaposition underscores North Korea's strategic intent to remodel its international persona, reflecting a keen awareness of digital media's influence in modern geopolitical discourse.

By thoroughly examining its recurring themes, keywords, alt texts of photos, captions and hashtags, as well as observing its evolution of strategies such as messaging, frequency of posting, engaging with the audience and how it differs from other state-run Instagram propaganda pages, the study transcends academic exploration, offering an intricate portrayal of North Korea's sophisticated propaganda mechanisms in the digital era. It sheds light on the politicisation of new media and unveils North Korea's employment of digital platforms as instruments of contemporary narrative shaping and diplomatic engagement.

This research enriches academic dialogues on North Korea's digital propaganda tactics and furnishes actionable insights for policymakers, media analysts, and global community to navigate and counteract the emerging trends of digital communication strategies employed by states like North Korea.

**Keywords:** North Korea Studies, DPRK Studies, Media Propaganda, North Korea Propaganda, DPRK Propaganda, DPRK Instagram, North Korea Social Media, Kim Jong-un Regime, International Sanctions, Political Communication, Strategic Messaging, State-led Narratives, Strategic Diversity, Propaganda Campaigns, Political Communication, Public Diplomacy, New Medi Strategies, Information Warfare

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background and Context

The 'DPRK Today' Instagram page has been a significant component of North Korea's digital propaganda strategy since its inception in November 2015. This page aims to project a curated image of North Korea to the global community. Unlike traditional state media, which targets both domestic and international audiences, 'DPRK Today' leverages Instagram's visual-centric platform to reach international viewers specifically, showcasing political messages, cultural exhibits, and economic achievements. The strategic use of images allows the DPRK to craft a compelling narrative that bypasses language barriers and resonates with a diverse global audience. Instagram’s emphasis on visual content makes it a powerful tool for propaganda. Images and short videos can evoke emotional responses and are easily shareable, extending their reach and impact. North Korea's use of hashtags, captions, and engagement tactics on the 'DPRK Today' further amplifies this effect, enhancing the visibility and influence of their posts. This shift to digital platforms reflects a broader trend of states utilising social media to extend their influence beyond national borders and engage in "digital diplomacy" or "cyber propaganda." North Korea, often perceived as isolated and insular, has adeptly harnessed this technology to influence global perceptions.

The 'DPRK Today' Instagram page is a prime example of how the country has embraced digital tools to craft its international image. This page is not merely a collection of random images and videos; it is a carefully curated digital facade that serves multiple strategic purposes. The content on the 'DPRK Today' is meticulously selected to promote a positive image of North Korea. Posts typically highlight the nation's advancements in various fields, including technology, agriculture, and infrastructure. Images of modern buildings, clean streets, and well-dressed citizens are common, creating a stark contrast to the often-negative portrayal of the country in Western media. Moreover, cultural exhibitions are a significant part of the page's content. Posts featuring traditional Korean dance, music, and art are prevalent. These cultural showcases deliberately serve to humanise the North Korean people and present the country as a custodian of rich cultural heritage. By doing so, the DPRK attempts to shift the narrative from one of political oppression and economic hardship to one of cultural pride and historical continuity. Unlike propaganda in traditional media, which was blatant and often shunned by international audience, North Korea's Instagram has attempted to portray North Korea as a "normal state" through somewhat experimental propaganda methods. North Korea has been actively utilising new media under the Kim Jong-un regime and changing its overall propaganda system, and social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube were extensions of that.

Political messages are subtly woven into the fabric of the 'DPRK Today's' content. One thing to note is the scarcity of images of the country's leadership, particularly Kim Jong-un as opposed to the traditional media. The lack of these posts is a stark contrast to those of conventional media, which mostly glorify Kim as a benevolent and omnipotent leader on every front page. The core contents of the DPRK Today Instagram page are not praising the leader. But rather, it is eventually saying that North Korea is a normal country and that U.S. sanctions have no effect on them by showing pictures of a thriving nation. It is not new for North Korea to post propaganda through social media. This is because social media is a platform that is more cost-effective. Social media such as Instagram are basically for external use as the Internet is not allowed in North Korea. Since it is impossible for an individual to have access to Instagram in North Korea, the prevailing view is that these channels are strictly operated by the North Korean regime, such as the Propaganda and Agitation Department or the United Front Department. It has been known that as of 2016, North Korea operated 24 social media channels, and they included YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Podcast and Pinterest. The international audience, including South Korean people had not been respondent to propagandistic contents of North Korea until recently. The DPRK Today Instagram features not only photos of bombing of the Inter-Korean liaison office, but also photos of food, people and leisure, the viral

topics that normally attract users' attention on Instagram. These topics naturally appeal to young people. Symbolism plays a crucial role in this digital narrative. The use of national symbols, such as the flag, its peculiar military parades, and monuments, is common. These symbols evoke a sense of national pride and unity, presenting North Korea as a unique and resilient nation. This is particularly important for a country that faces significant international criticisms and sanctions. Instagram's features, such as hashtags[2], captions, and stories, are utilised effectively by the 'DPRK Today' to enhance the reach and impact of their posts. Hashtags like #NorthKorea, #Pyongyang, and #Socialism are commonly used to ensure that the content reaches a wider audience that may be searching image materials for these topics. The hashtags help in categorising the posts, making them discoverable to users interested in related subjects. Captions are another critical element. They often include messages of patriotism, progress, and resilience. Even though the primary audience may not understand Korean language, the visual context combined with strategic English phrases ensures the message is communicated effectively along with the images. The use of Instagram Story feature allows for more dynamic content, including behind-the-scenes of state

[2] A hashtag is a metadata tag that is prefaced by the hash symbol, #. On social media, hashtags are used on microblogging and photo-sharing services as a form of user-generated tagging that enables cross-referencing of content by topic or theme.

events or real-time updates on current projects, keeping the audience engaged and informed. The impact of the 'DPRK Today' extends beyond mere viewership. It serves as a soft power tool, subtly influencing perceptions and opinions about North Korea. By presenting a polished image of the country, the page aims to counteract negative stereotypes and promote a more favourable narrative. Additionally, the 'DPRK Today' illustrates how states can use social media platforms to engage with international audiences directly, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers. This direct engagement allows for more controlled and targeted communication, increasing the efficacy of the propaganda. The 'DPRK Today' Instagram page represents a significant evolution in North Korea's propaganda strategy. By attempting new experiments in propaganda style, North Korea has managed to craft a compelling and multifaceted narrative that resonates with a global audience. This approach highlights the increasing importance of digital platforms in statecraft and the ongoing evolution of propaganda in the digital age.

## 1.2 Research Objective

The primary objective of this research is to explore the content, strategies, and objectives behind North Korea’s utilisation of social media for propagandistic purposes, with a particular focus on its Instagram endeavours. Specifically, the study seeks to examine how North Korea unfolded propaganda activities on the U.S. centric social media platform

Instagram and what it had achieved through its DPRK Today page by looking into its contents, evolution of strategies and their effectiveness. The study attempts to decode the complexities of North Korea's new digital propaganda strategy, offering a juxtaposition with its traditional propaganda systems. To achieve this objective, a central component of this research should be the thematic analysis of the content posted on the 'DPRK Today'. The core narratives that North Korea seeks to promote can be better understood by identifying recurring themes and messages. This involves examining the frequency of keywords, image descriptions, and hashtags used in the posts. The thematic analysis will be conducted using content analysis software to identify and categorise the primary themes. Key themes might include depictions of daily lives, technological and economic advancements and cultural abundance, which would meet the demands for sneak peek into one of the world's most reclusive countries. Shifts in propaganda focus and strategy over time can be discerned by mapping out these themes by each year. This can also be determined through a comparative study of the narratives disseminated through the DPRK Today Instagram vis-à-vis the contents propagated via traditional North Korean media channels, such as newspapers, broadcast televisions and state news agency. Through this comparative lens, the research aspires to illuminate the adaptive strategies of North Korean propaganda, accentuating the evolution and transition of its narrative techniques in

response to the digital media landscape. To better understand and evaluate how North Korea utilises Instagram for propaganda purposes, parallels with other state actors and their digital strategies can also be drawn. Additionally, this research needs to analyse how the content and strategies employed on this platform have changed over time and assess the effectiveness of these efforts in engaging and influencing a global audience. By assessing patterns or changes in the frequency of posts on the 'DPRK Today' Instagram page from November 2016 to January 2024. This analysis will provide insights into how North Korea's strategic use of Instagram has evolved and whether there are discernible periods of increased or decreased activities. The frequency of posts is a crucial metric for understanding the operational dynamics of the 'DPRK Today' page. By tracking the number of posts over a defined period, specific trends and patterns in the DPRK's social media strategy can be identified. For instance, periods of increased posting activity may correspond with significant national events, international incidents, or strategic campaigns aimed at shaping global perceptions. Conversely, periods of decreased activity could indicate strategic pauses, possibly reflecting internal changes or shifts in propaganda focus.

To analyse this, the study will employ data collection tools to archive and review all posts made from the page's inception in November 2016 until January 2024. Statistical methods will be used to identify trends,

including seasonality effects, and potential correlations with geopolitical events. This granular analysis aims to uncover the strategic rhythms behind North Korea's digital engagement. Understanding how user engagement with the 'DPRK Today' has gradually improved is another key focus of this research. User engagement metrics, such as likes, comments, shares, and follower growth, provide insights into how well the content resonates with the audience. These metrics can indicate the effectiveness of the propaganda in capturing and retaining the interest of viewers. The study will track these engagement metrics over the same period (November 2016 to January 2024), using tools like social media analytics platforms to gather data on each post's performance. Analysing trends in user engagement can assess which types of content generates the most interaction and how engagement has evolved over time. This aspect of the research will involve both quantitative analysis [3]of engagement metrics and qualitative analysis [4]of user comments to understand the nature of the interactions. Sentiment analysis will be used to evaluate the

[3] Quantitative approaches emphasise objective measurements and statistical, analytical, or numerical analysis of data obtained by interviews, questionnaires, and surveys or by using computational techniques to manipulate pre-existing statistical data.

[4] Qualitative research is a type of research that aims to gather and analyse non-numerical data in order to gain an understanding of individuals' social reality, including understanding their attitudes, beliefs, and motivation.

emotional tone of the captions, alt texts (of photos) and hashtags in the 'DPRK Today's posts. This technique involves using natural language processing (NLP) tools to determine whether the content's sentiment is positive, negative, or neutral. The mood that North Korea is attempting to convey through its social media presence can be gauged by performing sentiment analysis. The study will analyse gradual sentiment trends, correlating them with the thematic analysis and external events. For instance, periods of positive sentiment might align with internal celebrations or attempts to bolster national morale, while negative sentiment could reflect defensive propaganda during times of international criticisms and sanctions or rising tensions with South Korea and the U.S. By addressing these objectives, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how North Korea's social media propaganda has evolved in the last eight years. This evolution will be mapped against a backdrop of geopolitical developments, changes in international relations, and internal policy shifts within North Korea.

In summation, this thesis will explore and analyse the general evolution and expansion of North Korea's propaganda strategies through its 'DPRK Today' Instagram page by examining thematic contents, posting frequency, user engagement and sentiment trends. By doing so, it aims to provide a detailed and comprehensive interpretation of the strategies and effectiveness of North Korea's digital propaganda efforts. This study

further hopes to contribute significantly to the academic field of digital propaganda of authoritarian regimes such as North Korea and offer valuable insights for policymakers and social media platforms in addressing the challenges posed by state-sponsored digital campaigns.

## 1.3 Methodology and Its Limitations

To achieve the research objectives outlined above, this study employs a multi-faceted methodological approach, combining quantitative and qualitative analyses. The primary data source for this research is a dataset containing metadata from the 'DPRK Today' Instagram page, covering the period from November 2016 to January 2024. This dataset includes information such as timestamps, captions, hashtags, and engagement metrics for each post. The analysis is conducted using various Python[5] libraries and tools, including Pandas for data manipulation, Matplotlib for visualisation, and NLP techniques [6]for content and sentiment analysis. The first step in the methodology involves data collection and preparation. The dataset includes detailed metadata for each post, which is essential for the analysis. Timestamps are converted into a suitable format for time

[5] Python is a general-purpose language, which means it's designed to be used in a range of applications, including data science, software and web development, and automation.

[6] Natural language processing (NLP) is an interdisciplinary subfield of computer science - specifically Artificial Intelligence - and linguistics.

series analysis. Captions and hashtags are extracted and translated from Korean to English to ensure accurate content analysis. The engagement metrics, such as the number of likes and comments, are recorded for each post. Data cleaning processes are implemented to handle any inconsistencies or missing values in the dataset. This ensures that the subsequent analyses are based on accurate and reliable data. The use of Panda, one of Python libraries facilitates efficient data manipulation and preparation, making it easier to handle large datasets and perform complex analyses. The first analytical step involves a detailed content analysis performed to identify key themes and messages conveyed through the posts. This involves extracting keywords from captions and hashtags and categorising the posts into different themes, such as politics, economy, military, culture, and international relations. NLP techniques are employed to facilitate this analysis. Using content analysis software, the frequency of keywords is determined, and posts are categorised based on their themes. Visualisations, such as word clouds and topic modelling are created to illustrate the prevalence of different themes. This analysis helps understanding the primary focuses of North Korea's propaganda and how these themes have changed over time. The next step involves comparing these themes with those of traditional media. By looking into articles published by English Rodong Sinmun and English Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) from the same period of November 2016

to January 2024, the thesis will identify different thematic contents circulated by North Korea on Instagram, specifically for digital propaganda targeted for younger international audience who might not necessarily be interested in North Korea. To provide a comprehensive understanding of North Korea's digital propaganda efforts, it is also essential to compare the DPRK Today with similar initiatives by other state actors. Case studies of other countries using Instagram for propaganda can reveal common strategies and unique approaches, highlighting best practices and potential pitfalls. For example, analysing the Instagram strategies of Russia's state-owned media RT (Russia Today) or China's CGTN (China Global Television Network) can provide valuable insights into how different states utilise the platform for propaganda. These comparisons can help identify patterns in content themes, engagement tactics, and the overall effectiveness of Instagram as a propaganda tool. Comparative metrics, such as follower growth, engagement rates, and content virality, can be used to assess the relative success of different propaganda efforts. By examining these metrics across various state-sponsored Instagram pages, factors that contribute to higher engagement and broader reach can be identified. In addition to the thematic analysis, the research will examine how the DPRK Today Instagram page has evolved through various means of measurements. This can be first achieved by calculating the number of posts per month

and visualising the trends using time series graphs. Monthly posting frequency can be determined by converting the timestamps of the posts into a suitable format and aggregating the data. Matplotlib[7] is used to create visual representations of these trends, which helps identifying patterns or significant changes in posting behaviour. By analysing the posting frequency, periods of increased or decreased activity can be detected. These periods can then be correlated with significant geopolitical events, internal developments in North Korea, or changes in international relations so that it provides insights into how the social media tactics have evolved in response to external and internal factors. The next step involves analysing user engagement with the content. Engagement metrics, specifically the number of likes and comments, are examined to assess how users interact with the posts. The average number of likes and comments per post is calculated for each year, and trends are visualised to understand how engagement has expanded or retreated over time. This will provide a window to the effectiveness of North Korea's repetitive and enthusiastic propaganda efforts over the last years in its attempt to capture and retain the interest of viewers. It also allows us to identify posts or themes that resonate particularly well with the

[7] Matplotlib is a comprehensive library for creating static, animated, and interactive visualizations in Python.

international audience. Sentiment analysis on the captions will evaluate the emotional tone of the posts. The sentiment polarity scores are calculated using the TextBlob library[8], which assigns a sentiment score to each caption, indicating whether the tone is positive, negative, or neutral. The average sentiment per year is plotted to observe changes in the overall mood of the contents. Sentiment analysis provides insights into the emotional appeal of the propaganda. By tracking sentiment trends over the period, it can be assessed whether the tone of the content has shifted in response to external events or changes in propaganda strategy. This analysis complements the thematic analysis by providing an additional layer of understanding regarding the nature of the messages being conveyed. While the methodology adopted for this study is robust and comprehensive, several limitations must be acknowledged. Since January 2024, access to the actual images and videos on the 'DPRK Today' Instagram page has been restricted due to North Korea shutting down its social media channels altogether. As a result, the analysis relies solely on metadata (captions, hashtags, and engagement metrics) rather than the visual content itself. This limitation restricts the ability to analyse the visual propaganda in detail, which is a significant aspect of Instagram's

[8] TextBlob is a free, open-source library in Python for processing textual data. It is a powerful package that reduces the complexity of the contextual data and derives in-depth information from the text.

appeal and impact. Given that the platform is image-based, there has been a limitation of having to textualize the photos posted by North Korea and conduct a texts-based analysis. Another obstacle includes the majority of the captions and hashtags being written in Korean language, which may pose challenges in accurately interpreting the contents and their connotation. Although efforts are made to translate and analyse the text, some nuances and contextual meanings may be lost in translation. This could affect the accuracy of the content and sentiment analysis as well. Not only is it worth mentioning the possibility of misinterpretation of the Korean language into English, but also, imperfection and possible technical errors of the sentiment analysis tools such as TextBlob. They have inherent limitations in accurately capturing the emotional tone of text, especially when dealing with non-English languages or context-specific expressions. The results of the sentiment analysis should be interpreted with caution, as they may not fully reflect the intended emotional tone of the original content. The number of likes and comments on posts may not fully reflect genuine user engagement, as these metrics can be influenced by various factors, including bot activity or coordinated campaigns. Therefore, the engagement metrics should be considered as indicative rather than definitive measures of audience interaction. Additionally, these metrics do not capture the quality of engagement, such as the nature of comments or the depth of user interaction. Despite these

limitations, the study provides valuable insights into North Korea's use of Instagram for propaganda purposes and contributes to the understanding of digital propaganda strategies in the contemporary media landscape. By employing a combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses, this research offers a comprehensive overview of the evolution of the 'DPRK Today' Instagram page and its impact on a global audience. The methodology adopted allows for a detailed examination of North Korea's content themes, posting frequency, user engagement, and sentiment trends, providing a holistic view of North Korea's digital propaganda efforts. This research aims to shed light on the evolving tactics and effectiveness of North Korea's strategic use of Instagram as a modern and global propaganda tool, contributing to the broader field of digital propaganda studies and informing future research and policy decisions in this area.

# 2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

## 2.1 North Korean Propaganda Under Kim Jong-un Regime

North Korea's approach to social media is atypical compared to global norms, given its insular focus. Unlike many countries, it had put more

emphasis on internal audiences rather than seeking publicity or popularity from international audiences, having communication heavily inward-focused, with messages tightly controlled to influence its domestic populace. Although information from within North Korea had been scarce, interested social media users could still find occasional updates on Kim Jong-un's regime. This controlled dissemination contrasts sharply with the 24/7 global news cycle, however it continued to captivate those eager to explore North Korea's realities, identity, and future. Since Kim Jong-un assumed leadership of North Korea in 2011, the regime's propaganda strategies have evolved significantly, embracing modern digital platforms and media channels. Kim Jong-un's regime has modernised its approach to propaganda, incorporating social media to reach international audience. Scholars have noted a strategic shift from traditional forms of propaganda, such as state-controlled newspapers and broadcasts, to more interactive and visually appealing formats. This transition is seen as an effort to counteract international criticism and portray North Korea as a progressive and resilient nation. Myers[9] in 2010 argues that North Korean propaganda under Kim Jong-un continue to focus on portraying the North Korean people as virtuous and heroic, facing adversity with

[9] Myers, B. R. *The Cleanest Race: How North Koreans See Themselves and Why It Matters.* (Melville House, 2010.)

dignity and strength. Lankov (2013)[10] investigates the technical aspects of these propaganda, discussing how the regime has adapted its propaganda to highlight economic and technological advancements. This includes showcasing infrastructure projects and scientific achievements to present North Korea as a capable and modern state. Matherly (2019) [11]examines the functions of North Korean cultural propaganda under Kim Jong-un, highlighting the regime's efforts to use cultural narratives to promote a positive image internationally. Western media such as CNN[12] and BBC [13] also reported on North Korea's YouTube influencers, highlighting the regime's strategy to humanise its people and present a more relatable image to international audience. Seliger (2021) [14]analyses North Korea's new social media policies and their implications, highlighting the emphasis on economic development and cultural heritage.

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[10] Lankov, Andrei. *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failes Stalinist Utopia.* (Oxford University Press, 2013.)

[11] Matherly, Carter. *Examining Attitude Functions of North Korean Cultural Propaganda.* (McFarland & Company, North Korean Review Vol. 15, No. 1, 2019.) pp. 94 - 108

[12] Yeung, Jessie. Bae, Gawon. They eat ice cream and read 'Harry Potter,' but these North Korean YouTubers aren't what they seem. (CNN, 2023.)

[13] Kim, Hyeong-eun. North Korea: mukbang, vlog, kids YouTuber… North Korea's evolving YouTube. (BBC, 2020.)

[14] Seliger, Bernhard. *North Korea's New Social Media Policies.* (Ewha Womans University, State-led Development and Social Change in North Korea under Kim Jong-un Regime, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2021.)

Major research efforts at home and abroad have been focused on understanding changes in North Korean propaganda in the digital domain. In particular, Jung-ho Suh and Jun Soo-jin's "A study on changes in the Propaganda Image of North Korea using the YouTube: Focusing on the YouTube channel Echo of Truth,"[15] and Seongho Park, Hwajun Lee and Yongho Kim's "What Does North Korea Say through YouTube?: Applying Thematic Analysis and Text Mining-based Analysis" [16]provided important insights into the evolving nature of North Korean digital propaganda, especially on YouTube. Additionally, in overseas research, there is a study by Kahraman called "Examination of the North Korean Digital Propaganda And Strategic Communication Contents Through Critical Discourse Analysis." [17] This study uses critical discourse analysis to highlight the multifaceted and strategic nature of propaganda in the digital age. However, there appears to be a significant

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[15] Suh, Jungho. Jun, Soojin. *A study on changes in the Propaganda Image of North Korea using the YouTube – Focusing on the YouTube channel Echo of Truth –* (Communication Design Association of Korea, Journal of Communication Design, Volume 74, 2021) pp. 74-86

[16] Park, Sungho. Lee, Hwajun. Kim, Yongho. *What Does North Korea Say through YouTube?: Applying Thematic Analysis and Text Mining-based Analysis.* (The Korean Association of North Korean Studies, Journal of North Korean Studies Vol. 25, No. 1, 2021.) pp. 125 - 161

[17] Kahraman, Aybala Lale. *Examination of The North Korean Digital Propaganda And Strategic Communication Contents Through Critical Discourse Analysis.* (AKADEMIK HASSASIYETLER 10(21), 2023.)

gap between research on North Korea's use of platforms such as Twitter, YouTube and that of Instagram. This gap is evident in both domestic and international academia, indicating the need for more up-to-date and more diverse studies in this field. Domestic research is mainly limited to YouTube, and it is generally difficult to find any in-depth research overseas on North Korea's digital media propaganda. Additionally, it is also the case in major media, both domestically and internationally, the scarcity of reporting on the propaganda that North Korea had until recently been publicising on 'Instagram' specifically. While there are various limitations, this area deserves to command more attention, because comprehending North Korea's use of digital platforms other than YouTube could detail the North Korean authoritarian regime's new propaganda strategy and political focus in a broad sense. It also has implications digital diplomacy, and how states and international organisations can respond to state-controlled propaganda. By focusing on a less studied platform and one on which North Korea had most concentrated in terms of the frequency of posting, this study seeks to contribute to the current academic literature and provide a foundation for future research in this domain. While there is considerable scholarship on North Korea's propaganda, studies that specifically analyse its new social media strategies are still sparse. The literature presents a fragmented view of North Korea's propaganda evolution into the digital realm. By

synthesizing these disparate strands of research, this thesis forges a comprehensive analysis of North Korea's up-to-date social media narrative, its global engagement, and the palpable influence of its digital propaganda strategies. It has both academic and practical relevance and therefore intends to not only fill a crucial gap in the current academic landscape, but also to provide media experts and policy makers with a theoretical framework and insights. The literature on North Korean propaganda under Kim Jong-un indicates a significant shift towards digital and interactive media. Scholars highlight the regime's strategic use of social media to project a positive image internationally and foster national pride domestically. Despite the challenges in measuring its effectiveness, the available studies provide valuable insights into the evolving nature of North Korean propaganda and its impact on global perceptions. The review of currently available literature establishes the groundwork for understanding North Korea's propaganda evolution to new media. The following chapters will build on this foundation, applying a mixed methods approach to offer a thorough analysis of North Korea's social media presence and its implications for international relations and North Korea's communication studies.

## 2.2 Digital Propaganda Through Instagram

The emergence of social media platforms has revolutionised the dissemination of information and propaganda. Instagram, in particular,

stands out due to its emphasis on visual content, which can convey powerful messages quickly and effectively. Studies have shown that visual content is more engaging and can be more persuasive than text alone, making platforms like Instagram ideal for propaganda purposes (Highfield & Leaver, 2016). [18]Visual content's ability to evoke emotional responses and its shareability make it a potent tool for shaping public perceptions. North Korea's use of Instagram through the DPRK Today page is a prime example of digital propaganda. The regime's strategy aligns with trends observed globally, where state and non-state actors exploit social media to influence public opinion, manage perceptions, and conduct information warfare (Linvill & Warren, 2018). [19]By presenting an idealised version of North Korean life, emphasising themes such as unity, prosperity, and strength, the DPRK Today page aims to craft a specific narrative that counters negative stereotypes and promotes a positive image of the country. Instagram's algorithm, which prioritises visually appealing content, plays a significant role in maximising the reach and engagement of DPRK Today posts. This algorithmic advantage allows North Korean propaganda to infiltrate broader audiences

[18] Tim Highfield and Tama Leaver, *Instagrammatics and Digital Methods: Studying Visual Social Media from Selfies and GIFs to Memes and Emoji* (2016).

[19] Darren L. Linvill and Patrick L. Warren, *Troll Factories: Manufacturing Specialized Disinformation on Twitter* (2020)

organically, reaching users who might not actively seek out such content but encounter it through trending hashtags or popular posts. Research on digital propaganda has highlighted several key tactics employed by actors on Instagram. These include the strategic use of hashtags, the crafting of emotionally resonant messages, and the utilisation of high-quality visuals to enhance credibility and attractiveness (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019).[20]

Hashtags are a critical component of Instagram's ecosystem, acting as a tool for categorisation and discovery. North Korea's posts often use hashtags like #DPRK, #NorthKorea, and #KimJongUn to tap into existing conversations and reach a broader audience. By aligning with popular hashtags, 'DPRK Today' can ensure its content is seen by users interested in related topics, thus expanding its reach beyond followers. Hashtags also serve a dual purpose: they categorise content for users and signal to the Instagram algorithm the relevance and potential virality of posts. Effective hashtag strategies can significantly boost visibility, making it easier for propagandists to disseminate their messages widely and efficiently. Crafting emotionally resonant messages is another vital tactic. Emotional content tends to be more memorable and shareable, increasing its impact. North Korea's posts often depict scenes of national pride,

[20] Bradshaw, Samantha, and Philip Howard, *The Global Disinformation Order: 2019 Global Inventory of Organised Social Media Manipulation*." (Journal, January 1, 2019)

economic success, and cultural richness, designed to evoke positive emotions such as pride, admiration, and unity. By evoking these emotions, the 'DPRK Today' page aims to foster a positive perception of North Korea and counteract negative media narratives. The emotional appeal is further enhanced through storytelling. Posts often tell a story, whether about a successful agricultural project, a technological innovation, or a cultural celebration, making the content more relatable and engaging for the audience. This narrative approach helps in creating a cohesive and compelling portrayal of North Korea. The use of high-quality visuals is another crucial element of effective digital propaganda. High-resolution images and professionally produced videos lend an air of credibility and attractiveness to the content. North Korea's posts frequently feature well-composed photographs and videos showcasing modern infrastructure, happy citizens, and picturesque landscapes, all of which contribute to a polished and appealing image of the country. High-quality visuals not only attract attention but also enhance the perceived authenticity and professionalism of the content. In the context of propaganda, this can be particularly persuasive, as well-crafted images and videos are more likely to be trusted and shared by users. The interactivity of Instagram allows propagandists to engage directly with users, creating a sense of community and loyalty. This interaction can foster a more profound emotional connection between the propagandist and the audience, making

the messages more persuasive (Tufekci, 2017). [21] Through likes, comments, and direct messages, the 'DPRK Today' can interact with its audience, responding to comments and fostering a sense of participation. By analysing the comments and likes on 'DPRK Today' posts, one can gauge the effectiveness of North Korea's digital propaganda efforts and understand how users perceive and react to their content. User engagement metrics provide insights into the reach and resonance of the posts, indicating which themes and messages are most effective in eliciting a response. The interactive nature of Instagram also allows for the building of a community around the 'DPRK Today' page. Regular engagement with followers through comments and direct interactions can cultivate a loyal and supportive audience. This community aspect is crucial for sustaining long-term propaganda efforts, as it creates a network of individuals who are likely to share and promote the content, further amplifying its reach. Encouraging user-generated content is another strategy that can enhance the effectiveness of propaganda. By prompting followers to share their own posts with specific hashtags or participate in challenges, the 'DPRK Today' can create a sense of involvement and ownership among its audience. User-generated content not only increases

[21] E. Fournier-Tombs, *Book Review: Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest* (2020), pp. 1417-1419.

engagement but also acts as a form of endorsement, lending additional credibility and authenticity to the propaganda. The research framework for this study involves a structured approach to investigating North Korea's use of Instagram for propaganda purposes. This framework is designed to systematically address the research questions and objectives outlined in the previous chapters. The study is guided by several key research questions of how North Korea's DPRK Today Instagram page had evolved strategically in terms of propagating its agenda and how successful they had been, by looking at the primary themes, messages conveyed, user engagement, frequency of posts, emotional tones of the captions, use of hashtags over time, and the growth in the number of followers.

In conclusion, this literature review and research framework provide a comprehensive foundation for analysing North Korea's use of Instagram for propaganda purposes. By examining posting frequency, engagement metrics, thematic content, and sentiment, the study aims to offer detailed insights into the evolution and effectiveness of 'DPRK Today'. This research contributes to the broader field of digital propaganda studies and offers valuable perspectives on the use of social media for state-sponsored influence campaigns. Through a structured and methodologically rigorous approach, this study not only enhances our understanding of North Korea's digital propaganda strategies but also informs efforts to

develop effective countermeasures. By highlighting the tactics and impacts of digital propaganda, the research underscores the need for continued vigilance and innovation in addressing the challenges posed by state-sponsored influence in the digital age.

## 2.3 Visual Communication in Digital Media

Visual communication is a crucial aspect of digital media, particularly on platforms like Instagram, where images and videos are the primary means of interaction. Visual content can transcend language barriers and convey complex messages quickly, making it an effective tool for propaganda (Messaris, 1997). [22]The power of visual communication lies in its ability to evoke immediate and potent emotional responses, which can be leveraged to influence public perception and opinion. Studies in visual communication suggest that images can evoke stronger emotional responses than text, as they are processed more quickly and can trigger subconscious associations (Barry, 1997). [23]This capability is particularly relevant for propaganda, which often aims to elicit emotional reactions

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[22] Stig Hjarvard, *Paul Messaris: Visual Persuasion. The Role of Images in Advertising (*MedieKultur: Journal of Media and Communication Research, September 3, 1997)

[23] Ann Marie Barry, *Visual Intelligence: Perception, Image, and Manipulation in Visual Communication* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997)

that can override critical thinking (Grabe & Bucy, 2009). [24]For instance, images of happy, healthy citizens or grandiose military parades can create positive associations with the regime, despite the viewer's lack of context or critical engagement with the reality behind these images. The immediacy and emotional impact of visual content make it an ideal medium for propaganda. Images can bypass the rational filters that individuals typically apply when processing textual information, directly appealing to emotions and biases. This makes visual propaganda a powerful tool for shaping perceptions and attitudes. North Korea's DPRK Today Instagram page employs various visual communication strategies to maximise the impact of its posts. The use of vibrant colours, dramatic compositions, and culturally resonant symbols helps to capture attention and convey a message of strength and vitality. Additionally, the repetitive use of certain visual motifs, such as images of the North Korean citizens or patriotic symbols, reinforces the central narratives of unity and loyalty. The strategic use of colour in visual content can significantly influence viewers' perceptions. Bright and vibrant colours are often associated with positivity and energy, while dark and muted tones can evoke feelings of seriousness or sombreness. North Korea's use of vibrant colours in images

[24] Maria Grabe and Erik Bucy, *Image Bite Politics: News and the Visual Framing of Elections* (Image Bite Politics: News and the Visual Framing of Elections, January 1, 2010)

depicting progress, celebration, and national pride serves to create an upbeat and optimistic portrayal of the country. Dramatic compositions in images can also enhance the perceived significance and impact of the depicted scenes. For example, images of large crowds, military parades, or monumental architecture are often framed in a way that emphasises scale and grandeur, reinforcing the narrative of North Korea as a powerful and cohesive nation. These visual techniques are not unique to North Korea but are common in state propaganda, where the goal is to project an image of strength and stability. Visual symbols and motifs play a critical role in propaganda by conveying specific messages and values. In the case of 'DPRK Today,' symbols such as the national flag, military hardware, and images of the people are frequently used to evoke feelings of patriotism and loyalty. These symbols are strategically incorporated into visual content to reinforce the regime's ideological narratives. The repetitive use of these symbols helps to create a sense of familiarity and association. For example, frequent depictions of the North Korean people in various scenes serve to humanise and legitimise the North Korean regime. This visual repetition reinforces the centrality of the people in North Korean society and politics. Patriotic symbols, such as the national flag or iconic monuments, are used to evoke national pride and unity. By incorporating these symbols into everyday scenes, such as workers in a factory or students in a classroom, the propaganda seeks to link personal

and communal success with national identity and loyalty to the regime. Another critical aspect of visual communication in digital media is the concept of "visual framing." This refers to the way visual elements are presented to shape the viewer's perception and interpretation of the content (Entman, 1993)[25]. North Korea uses visual framing to present a sanitised and idealised view of the country, carefully curating images that emphasise positive aspects while omitting or downplaying negative ones. This selective representation helps to construct a favourable narrative that supports the regime's propaganda goals. Visual framing involves choices about what to include in an image and what to exclude. By focusing on positive scenes – such as well-maintained public spaces, advanced technological projects, or happy and healthy citizens – and avoiding depictions of poverty, dissent, or hardship, the propaganda creates a skewed perception of reality. This selective framing is designed to bolster the regime's image and suppress counter-narratives. Analysing case studies of visual propaganda also provided deeper insights into the strategies and effectiveness of visual communication. For instance, Russia's use of visual propaganda, particularly through state-controlled media and social media platforms, emphasises themes of nationalism,

[25] Robert Entman, *Framing: Toward Clarification of A Fractured Paradigm* (*The Journal of Communication* 43, December 1, 1993) pp. 51-58

historical pride, and military strength. Images of President Vladimir Putin engaging in rugged activities, participating in military exercises, or interacting with world leaders are designed to project an image of robust leadership and international influence. This visual strategy reinforces the narrative of Russia as a resurgent global power. China's visual propaganda often focuses on economic progress, technological innovation, and cultural heritage. State media and social media platforms frequently feature images of modern infrastructure projects, scientific advancements, and traditional cultural events. By showcasing these aspects, the propaganda aims to promote a narrative of continuous development and cultural richness, positioning China as a leader in both modernity and tradition. Several theoretical perspectives can help elucidate the mechanisms and effects of visual communication in propaganda. In the context of propaganda, images are crafted to signify positive attributes of the regime, such as strength, unity, and progress. Emotional contagion theory suggests that people can "catch" emotions from others through nonverbal cues, such as facial expressions and body language (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1993)[26]. Visual content in propaganda often includes expressive imagery designed to evoke specific emotions. For

[26] Elaine Hatfield, John T. Cacioppo, and Richard L. Rapson, *Emotional Contagion* (Current Directions in Psychological Science 2, no. 3, 1993) pp. 96–99

example, images of smiling children or enthusiastic crowds can induce feelings of happiness and optimism in viewers, thereby enhancing the persuasive impact of the propaganda. Cultivation theory posits that long-term exposure to media content can shape individuals' perceptions of reality (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980)[27]. In the context of visual propaganda, repeated exposure to idealised images can cultivate a perception of the regime that aligns with the intended narrative. Over time, viewers may come to accept the depicted reality as the actual state of affairs, reinforcing the propaganda's effectiveness. Visual communication is a powerful and essential aspect of digital media, particularly for propaganda purposes. North Korea's 'DPRK Today' Instagram page exemplifies how visual content can be strategically used to shape perceptions and influence public opinion. By leveraging vibrant colours, dramatic compositions, culturally resonant symbols, and visual framing, the regime crafts a compelling narrative that supports its ideological goals. Understanding these visual communication strategies and their impacts provides valuable insights into the broader field of digital propaganda and highlights the need for continued research and media literacy efforts.

## 2.4 State-Led Propaganda Strategies

[27] George Gerbner, L. Gross, Michael Morgan, and Nancy Signorielli, *Growing Up with Television: The Cultivation Perspective* (1994)

State-led propaganda has a long history, but the methods and tools available to governments have evolved significantly with the advent of digital media. Traditional propaganda often relied on controlled media outlets, but digital platforms offer new opportunities for reaching and influencing both domestic and international audiences (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2019).[28] North Korea's use of Instagram represents a modern adaptation of traditional propaganda strategies. The core principles remain the same: control the narrative, emphasise positive aspects of the regime, and suppress dissenting voices. However, the techniques have been updated to suit the digital age. This includes the use of social media algorithms to increase visibility, the creation of engaging and shareable content, and the ability to directly interact with followers. One notable strategy is the use of "soft power" through cultural diplomacy. By showcasing cultural achievements, such as art, music, and sports, North Korea aims to create a positive image that can attract sympathy and admiration from international audiences (Nye, 2004)[29]. The 'DPRK Today' Instagram page frequently features posts about cultural events, traditional performances, and other aspects of North Korean culture that

[28] Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2018)

[29] Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2004)

are designed to appeal to a global audience. Another strategy is the use of "controlled transparency." By selectively sharing certain aspects of life in North Korea, the regime can appear more open and transparent, which can help to counter negative perceptions and criticism (Rawnsley, 2015)[30]. This approach involves carefully curating content to highlight positive developments and successes while minimising or ignoring negative issues. The 'DPRK Today' page often features posts about economic development projects, technological advancements, and improvements in living standards, all presented in a highly positive light. Furthermore, state-led propaganda on digital platforms often involves the creation of a cohesive and consistent narrative. This narrative is reinforced through repeated messages and themes, creating a unified and persuasive story that can be more easily accepted by the audience (Ellul, 1965)[31]. North Korea's Instagram posts frequently emphasise themes of national pride, resilience, and loyalty to the leadership, creating a strong and consistent narrative that supports the regime's goals.

In conclusion, the study of digital propaganda through Instagram, visual communication in digital media, and state-led propaganda

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[30] Gary D. Rawnsley*, To Know Us Is to Love Us: Public Diplomacy and International Broadcasting in Contemporary Russia and China* (Politics *35*, no. 3-4, 2015)

[31] Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (New York: Knopf, 1965)

strategies provides a comprehensive framework for analysing North Korea's use of the DPRK Today Instagram page. By understanding the tactics and techniques employed, it is possible to gain insights into how digital propaganda is crafted and disseminated, as well as its potential impact on global audiences. This research contributes to the broader field of digital propaganda studies and offers valuable perspectives on the evolving nature of state-led information warfare in the digital age.

# 3. North Korea’s Use of Instagram

## 3.1 Introduction to DPRK Today Instagram Page

The 'DPRK Today' Instagram page represents a strategic shift in North Korea's propaganda efforts, targeting a global audience through modern digital media. Traditionally, North Korean propaganda relied on state-controlled print media, radio, and television aimed primarily at domestic audiences. However, the advent of social media has provided the regime with new avenues to project its narrative internationally. The primary goal of the DPRK Today Instagram page is to present an idealised image of North Korea to the global community. By leveraging Instagram’s visual appeal, the regime seeks to counteract negative perceptions and highlight its version of progress, unity, and cultural richness. This initiative aligns with broader objectives to enhance North Korea's soft power and shape global perceptions in its favour. The content on the DPRK Today

Instagram page is carefully curated to convey themes that support the regime's propaganda objectives. These themes include national pride, economic development, cultural heritage, diplomatic engagements, and the welfare of the North Korean people. Each post is designed to reinforce these narratives through visually appealing images and videos. Many posts celebrate North Korea's national achievements and historical milestones, showcasing national holidays, cultural events, and public celebrations. These posts aim to foster a sense of national pride and unity among viewers. Showcasing economic progress is another key theme, with posts featuring images of modern infrastructure projects, industrial advancements, rather sophisticated everyday lives of North Korean people, and agricultural successes to portray North Korea as a country making significant strides in development despite international sanctions and isolation.

<Image 1> North Korea's DPRK TODAY Instagram page[32]




[32] A screenshot of the DPRK Today Instagram account http://instagram.com/dprktoday



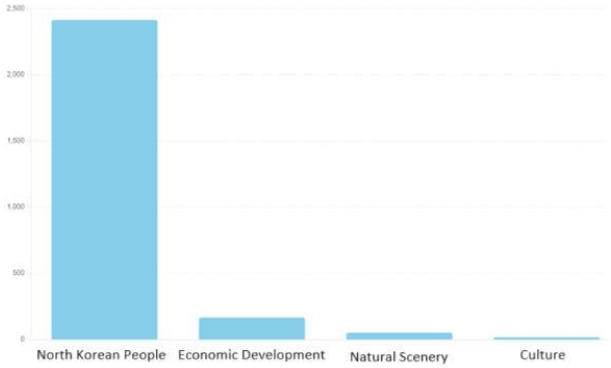
Promotion of North Korean culture is a prominent aspect of the page. Images of traditional music, dance, festivals, and historical sites are frequently posted, humanising the North Korean people and presenting the country as a custodian of a rich and unique heritage. Instagram offers various features to enhance the visibility and impact of posts, but 'DPRK Today' has not fully utilised these features such as Instagram Stories or reels. Their postings, often systematic with captions and hashtags, have not shown significant adaptation to Instagram's newer features, despite

the content being vibrant and lively. Hashtags are critical for increasing post visibility. Common hashtags used by 'DPRK Today' include #DPRK, #NorthKorea, and #Socialism, which help categorise content and make it discoverable to users interested in related topics. Strategic use of English phrases in captions ensures the message is communicated effectively to a broader audience. Engagement metrics such as likes, comments, and shares provide insights into the effectiveness of North Korea's digital propaganda. While some engagement may be genuine, it is important to consider the potential influence of coordinated campaigns or bot activity that can artificially inflate these metrics. Comments often provide qualitative insights into viewer perceptions, revealing how the content resonates with audiences. Despite its strategic use of Instagram, 'DPRK Today' faces several challenges and limitations. One significant challenge is the language barrier, as most captions and hashtags are in Korean. This limits the full impact of the propaganda to non-Korean speakers. Additionally, platform restrictions and potential account suspensions pose greater risks. Instagram's community guidelines can be used to limit the spread of state-sponsored propaganda, and accounts can be suspended for policy violations. The sharp decline in posting frequency in January 2024, corresponding with North Korea's decision to shut down its social media channels, underscores the vulnerability of such digital propaganda efforts to platform regulations and external pressures.

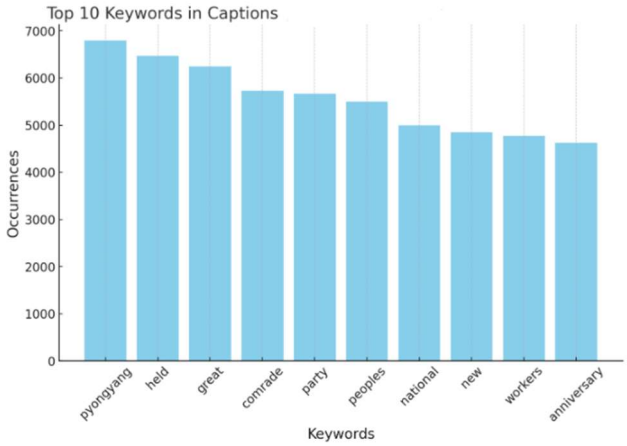
## 3.2 Content Types and Themes

The content on 'DPRK Today' can be categorised into several distinct types, each serving a specific purpose within the regime's propaganda strategy. High-quality still photographs dominate 'DPRK Today,' depicting various aspects of North Korean life, from everyday activities to major state events. These images emphasise vibrant colours, meticulous composition, and positive imagery, aiming to present an idealised version of the country. Notably, the page lacks infographics, which could effectively convey complex information visually. The absence of Instagram Stories is also notable. Typically, Stories would provide dynamic and temporary content such as live event coverage or daily life glimpses, keeping the audience engaged. 'DPRK Today' has not utilised this feature, potentially missing opportunities for fresh and varied content. Recurring themes on 'DPRK Today' align with North Korea's propaganda goals, everyday lives of North Korean people, North Korean products, economic development, technological advancement, natural scenery, cultural heritage, and international relations and diplomacy.

<Figure 1> Post Categories on DPRK Today Instagram Page




<Figure 2> Top 10 keywords most used by North Korean Instagram




The bar figure provides a visual representation of the distribution of posts across various themes aligned with North Korea's propaganda goals. The majority of posts fall under the "Cultural Heritage" category, with a

total of 2,431 posts. This indicates a strong emphasis on showcasing North Korea's traditional music, dance, art, festivals and historical landmarks. The focus on cultural heritage likely aims to emphasize the country's rich cultural identity and historical continuity. The second most common theme is "Economic Development and Progress," with 166 posts. This category highlights new infrastructure projects, modern factories, agricultural advancements, and commercial spaces. The portrayal of such developments serves to present North Korea as a nation of progress and innovation, emphasizing self-sufficiency and economic growth. With 52 posts, the "National Pride and Unity" category includes content related to national holidays, historical commemorations, military parades, mass games, and public celebrations. These posts foster a sense of collective identity and patriotism among citizens. The "International Relations and Diplomacy" category has 18 posts, depicting visits by international delegations, meetings with foreign dignitaries, participation in global events, and diplomatic achievements. This theme aims to present North Korea as an active and respected member of the global community, highlighting its diplomatic efforts. Interestingly, in line with the minimal feature of Kim Jong-un, posts could not be categorised under "Leadership Portrayal" of Kim Jong-un. This strategic choice might be intended to focus on national achievements and dilute the totalitarian image traditionally associated with the leadership. The distribution of posts

suggests a deliberate strategy to highlight cultural heritage and economic progress, reinforcing North Korea's image as a culturally rich and advancing nation. The heavy reliance on visual content, particularly in the "Cultural Heritage" category, underscores the importance of visual communication in modern propaganda. The absence of frequent leadership portrayal indicates selective representation to potentially shift focus from individual leadership to collective national achievements.

Topic modelling is a statistical method used in natural language processing and text mining to discover abstract topics within a collection of documents. This method is particularly useful in organising, understanding, and summarizing large datasets of textual information. In the context of topic modelling, a document refers to a single piece of text, which can vary in length from a tweet to an entire book. A collection of such documents is called a corpus. The primary objective of topic modelling is to find topics, which are essentially recurring patterns of co-occurring words, within this corpus. A crucial aspect of topic modelling is that it is an unsupervised learning technique, meaning it automatically identifies these patterns without needing any prior labelling or training. The topics are not predefined; instead, they emerge from the analysis based on the statistical distribution of words across the documents. One popular algorithm for topic modelling is Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA). LDA is a popular technique for extracting topics from a collection

of texts. It assumes that each document (in this case, each caption) is a mixture of topics and that each topic is a mixture of words. This method will help us identify clusters of words that frequently occur together, which can be interpreted as topics. To prepare the text data for LDA, preprocessing is required, including steps like tokenization (breaking text into individual words), removing stop words or common words that do not contribute much meaning, such as “the,” “and,” etc., and possibly other steps depending on the specific characteristics of the text. After preprocessing, the LDA model is applied to identify topics. The topic modelling analysis has identified five distinct topics from the captions in the dataset of 28,000 ‘DPRKTODAY’ Instagram posts. The top words associated with each topic can give us an idea of the themes or subjects present in the data. In this “topic modelling,” keywords are combined to find out what topics North Korea’s Instagram posts consist of.

In LDA, “Beta(β)” is a parameter indicating word distribution by subject. In particular, β is a K×V-sized matrix, where K is the number of topics, and V is the size of the vocabulary. β[k][v] represents the probability that the word v appears for topic k. Obtaining the Beta value is actually one of the results of the LDA algorithm. Until the algorithm converges, the θ (topic distribution by document) and β (word distribution by topic) values are repeatedly updated and estimated through techniques such as Gibbs sampling or variational Bayesian inference. As a result of

analysis using LDA-based topic modelling, five distinct topics from the captions in the dataset had been identified, and the top six words and beta values accordingly are as follows.

<Table 1 > Topic Modelling: Cultural and Artistic Events

| | Word | Beta |
|---|---|---|
| Topic 1 | Performance | 0.111 |
| | Youth | 0.107 |
| | Art | 0.087 |
| | Festival | 0.096 |
| | Pyongyang | 0.308 |
| | People | 0.291 |
| Topic 1 Name: Cultural and Artistic Events | | |

Since Topic 1 is a topic composed of words such as performance, youth, art, festival, Pyongyang and people, the topic name was set as Cultural and Artistic Events. This table highlights the significant emphasis North Korea places on cultural and artistic events as part of its digital propaganda strategy. Words such as "performance," "youth," "art," "festival," "Pyongyang," and "people" dominate this category, signifying a concerted effort to showcase the country's cultural vibrancy and heritage. The high Beta values, especially for "Pyongyang" and "people," suggest a strategic focus on portraying the capital as a cultural hub and emphasizing the populace's active participation in these events. This thematic focus serves not only to bolster national pride but also to

counteract external narratives that often overlook the cultural dimensions of North Korean society.

<Table 2> Topic Modelling: Visits and Delegations

| | Word | Beta |
|---|---|---|
| Topic 2 | Visited | 0.154 |
| | Delegation | 0.172 |
| | Members | 0.178 |
| | Comrade | 0.348 |
| | Korea | 0.342 |
| | Revolutionary | 0.095 |
| Topic 2 Name: Visits and Delegations | | |

As Topic 2 is a topic composed of words such as visited, delegation, members, comrade, Korea, and revolutionary, the topic name was set as Visits and Delegations. This table delves into the diplomatic engagements and international relations portrayed through North Korea's Instagram. The prevalence of terms like "visited," "delegation," "members," "comrade," "Korea," and "revolutionary" indicates a narrative centred around solidarity, international outreach, and the regime's active role on the global stage. The significant Beta values for "comrade" and "Korea" underscore the portrayal of a unified national identity and the leadership's central role in these diplomatic endeavours. This thematic category aims to project an image of North Korea as an engaged and proactive member of the international community, despite prevailing narratives of isolation.

<Table 3> Topic Modelling: Political and National Celebrations

| | Word | Beta |
|---|---|---|
| Topic 3 | Anniversary | 0.178 |
| | Held | 0.304 |
| | Day | 0.151 |
| | Party | 0.176 |
| | Korean | 0.115 |
| | Founding | 0.075 |
| Topic3 Name: Political and National Celebrations | | |

Topic 3 is a topic composed of words such as anniversary, held, day, party, Korean, and founding, so the topic name was set to Political and National Celebrations. Focusing on the theme of political and national celebrations, this table showcases the words "anniversary," "held," "day," "party," "Korean," and "founding," which are pivotal in constructing a narrative of national unity, historical continuity, and political legitimacy. The elevated Beta values for "held" and "day" highlight the importance of commemorating significant dates in the national calendar, serving as a tool for regime legitimization and the reinforcement of a collective national identity. This category underscores the regime's effort to instil a sense of pride and belonging among its citizens through the celebration of key political milestones and national events.

<Table 4> Topic Modelling: Exhibitions, Ceremonies, and Sports

| | Word | Beta |
|---|---|---|
| Topic 4 | Exhibition | 0.242 |
| | Ceremony | 0.206 |
| | Children | 0.162 |
| | Sports | 0.130 |
| | Opening | 0.161 |
| | Boys | 0.098 |
| Topic4 Name: Exhibitions, Ceremonies, and Sports | | |

Since Topic 4 is a topic composed of words such as exhibition, ceremony, children, sports, opening, and boys, the topic name was set as Exhibitions, Ceremonies and Sports. This table captures the diverse range of public events, including exhibitions, ceremonies, and sports, that are used to craft a narrative of a dynamic and engaged society. The words "exhibition," "ceremony," "children," "sports," "opening," and "boys" reflect a focus on community involvement, youth engagement, and the promotion of a healthy, vibrant public life. The prominence of "exhibition" and "ceremony" with high Beta values emphasizes the role of these events in showcasing achievements and fostering a sense of collective achievement and progress. This thematic area highlights the regime's attempt to present a positive and forward-looking image of North Korean society.

<Table 5> Topic Modelling: Leadership and Ideology

| | Word | Beta |
|---|---|---|
| Topic 5 | Kim | 0.229 |
| | Great | 0.248 |
| | Leader | 0.165 |
| | Workers | 0.210 |
| | Comrade | 0.244 |
| | New | 0.133 |
| Topic 5 Name: Leadership and Ideology | | |

As Topic 5 is a topic composed of words such as Kim, great, leader, workers, comrade, and new, the topic name was set as Leadership and Ideology. This table emphasizes the central role of leadership and ideology in North Korea's digital messaging. The dominant words "Kim," "great," "leader," "workers," "comrade," and "new" underscore the veneration of the Kim dynasty and the propagation of the state's ideological tenets. The high Beta values for "Kim" and "great" particularly highlight the cult of personality surrounding the leadership. This thematic focus is pivotal in reinforcing the legitimacy of the regime and its ideological underpinnings, serving as a cornerstone of the state's propaganda efforts to unify the populace under the banner of its leadership and ideology. Each topic was represented by a distribution of words. The topics identified are essentially clusters of words that frequently co-occur

across the captions. For instance, words like "performance", "art", "festival", and "national" appeared frequently together in several captions, leading to the formation of the "Cultural and Artistic Events" topic. The topics were then interpreted based on the words that were most strongly associated with them. For example, the topic with keywords such as "visited", "delegation", “members” and "revolutionary" was interpreted as "Visits and Delegations". This interpretation was based on an understanding of how these words collectively give meaning to a certain theme or subject. The interpretation of these topics requires a level of quantitative analysis, where one looks at the most representative words for each topic and deduces the common thread or theme that runs through them. The Beta values in LDA, a popular method for topic modelling, are fundamental to understanding the distribution and significance of words within topics. When an LDA model is trained on a corpus, which is a collection of documents, it aims to learn two key distributions: the distribution of topics across each document and the distribution of words within each topic. The Beta value for a particular word within a topic is a measure of that word's frequency or importance in the topic. It's essentially the probability of observing the word given the topic. These Beta values are not manually computed but are instead derived as part of the LDA model's learning process. Each value is a component of the "topic-word distribution" learned by the model. Typically, a β value close

to 1 signifies that a particular word has a very high likelihood of appearing in a specific topic. This suggests that the word is highly characteristic of that topic. For instance, if the β value for "art" in the topic "Cultural and Artistic Events" is close to 1, it indicates that "art" strongly represents cultural and artistic events. Conversely, a β value close to 0 suggests that a word has a very low probability of appearing in a specific topic, implying that it is not characteristic of that topic. For example, if the β value for "sports" in the topic "Cultural and Artistic Events" is close to 0, it implies that "sports" is not commonly associated with cultural and artistic events. Most β values fall between 0 and 1, indicating varying degrees of association between words and topics. A β value of 0.5, for instance, implies that the word has an equal chance of appearing in the topic and not appearing in the topic. The practical implication of these values is significant for interpreting the LDA model's output. For instance, a word with a high Beta value in a particular topic is considered highly representative of that topic. This allows not just for the interpretation and labelling of the topic but also for comparing the relative importance of words across different topics. These values are critical in deciphering the primary themes or subjects that the LDA model has unearthed from the text corpus.

## 3.3 Visual and Textual Analysis

Visual content is a cornerstone of Instagram and a primary tool for the 'DPRK Today' page. This analysis focuses on the types of images and videos posted, their composition, and the recurring visual themes that characterise the page. The dataset indicates that 'DPRK Today' predominantly uses high-quality photographs. These visuals are meticulously composed to convey specific messages. The use of bright and vibrant colours is prevalent, designed to evoke positive emotions and attract viewers' attention. These colours are often used in images of celebrations, national events, and everyday life to create an optimistic portrayal of North Korea. Many images employ dramatic angles and perspectives to enhance the visual impact. For instance, photographs of military parades are often taken from low angles to emphasise the scale and grandeur, while images of infrastructure projects are shot from aerial perspectives to showcase their scope. The frequent use of national symbols, such as the North Korean flag and images of statues of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il is a hallmark of the visual content. These symbols are strategically placed to reinforce themes of national pride, leadership, and unity. Images of national holidays, mass gatherings and everyday lives of the North Korean people are commonly used to highlight the unity and collective spirit of the North Korean people. Visuals showcasing new infrastructure, modern buildings, and industrial advancements aim to portray North Korea as a progressing nation, despite international

sanctions and economic challenges. Regularly featured traditional dances, music performances, and cultural festivals serve to highlight North Korea's rich cultural heritage and foster a sense of national pride.

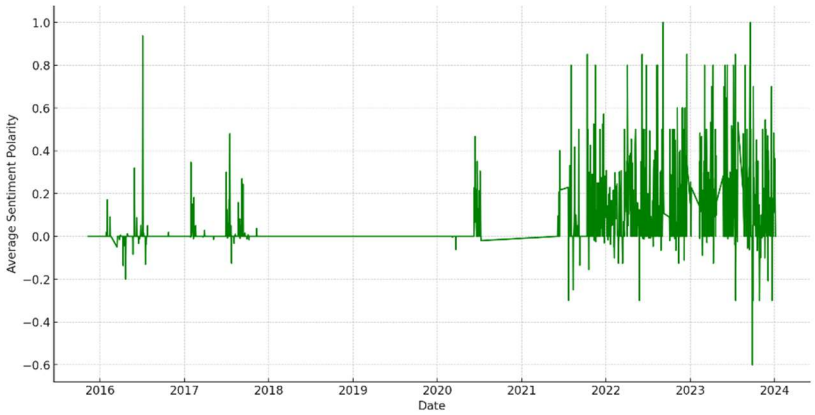
<Figure 3> Word Cloud of Captions on DPRK Today Instagram Page




The textual elements of the 'DPRK Today' posts, including captions and hashtags, play a crucial role in reinforcing the visual messages and enhancing the overall impact. Captions on 'DPRK Today' are typically written in Korean, with occasional use of English phrases to reach a broader audience. Phrases that emphasise national pride, such as "강성대국" (strong and prosperous nation) and "위대한 조국" (great fatherland), are commonly used to evoke patriotic feelings. Descriptions of events, achievements, and developments provide context to the visuals. This information helps viewers understand the significance of the images

and videos, aligning them with the regime's narratives. The strategic use of hashtags helps increase the visibility of posts and connect them to broader conversations. #DPRK is a widely used hashtag to categorise content related to North Korea. #NorthKorea is used to reach an international audience interested in North Korean topics. #Socialism reflects the ideological stance of the regime and connects posts to discussions on socialism and related themes.

<Figure 4> Daily Average Sentiment of Instagram Captions




Sentiment analysis of the captions reveals the emotional tone conveyed through the text. Using tools like TextBlob, sentiment polarity scores were calculated for the captions, providing insights into whether the tone is positive, negative, or neutral. The graph above shows the daily average sentiment polarity of the captions used in the 'DPRK Today' Instagram posts. The majority of captions convey a positive sentiment, highlighting

achievements, progress, and national pride. This positive tone is intended to create an optimistic image of North Korea. Some captions are neutral, providing factual information without strong emotional undertones. These posts often include descriptions of events or statements from leaders. Negative sentiment is seldom used, reflecting the regime's focus on projecting a positive image. When present, it is typically in the context of condemning external threats or adversaries. The visual and textual analysis of the 'DPRK Today' Instagram page reveals a sophisticated and strategic approach to digital propaganda. By combining visually appealing content with carefully crafted captions and hashtags, North Korea to a certain extent effectively utilises Instagram to project an idealised image of the country and influence international perceptions. The consistent themes of national pride, economic development, cultural heritage, and leadership, reinforced through positive sentiment, highlight the regime's efforts to shape its narrative in the digital age. This analysis provides valuable insights into the mechanisms of modern propaganda and the role of social media in statecraft.

# 4. Comparative Analysis

## 4.1 Comparison with Traditional Media Propaganda

This chapter compares the propaganda styles and strategies employed by the DPRK Today Instagram page, English version of the Rodong Sinmun newspaper, and English version of the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) website from December 2016 to December, 2023. The target audience for these media is the international community. By providing content in English, Rodong Sinmun and KCNA seek to influence foreign perceptions of North Korea as DPRK Today Instagram page, offering an alternative perspective to Western media narratives. The goal is to garner sympathy or at least understanding of North Korea's positions on various issues. Examining these sources aims to understand key differences and evolution of North Korea's propaganda according to different media, while retaining its foundational principles.

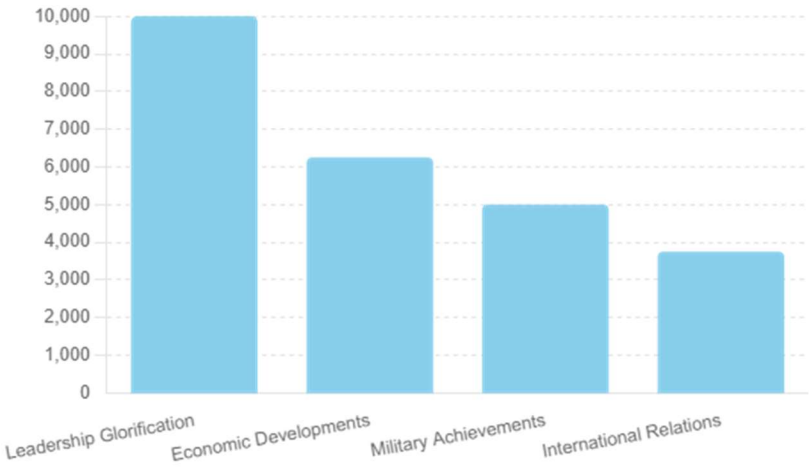
### 4.1.1 The Rodong Sinmun

Rodong Sinmun, [33]the official newspaper of the Workers' Party of Korea, plays a crucial role in disseminating the regime's propaganda and maintaining ideological control within North Korea. Analysing its content from the time period reveals consistent themes and strategies that align with the party's objectives. This chapter provides a detailed analysis of the newspaper's content, focusing on the distribution of topics, the language and tone used, the imagery, and the emphasis on campaigns and

[33] http://www.rodong.rep.kp/en/

slogans. From December, 2016 to December, 2023, Rodong Sinmun published approximately 25,000 articles averaging around 3,500 articles per year. The content can be broadly categorized into several key themes; leadership glorification (40%), Economic Developments (25%), Military Achievements (20%), and International Relations (15%).

<Figure 5> Distribution of Articles By Category on English Rodong Sinmun (2016-2023)




Leadership Glorification includes editorials, articles, and images that extol the virtues and achievements of Kim Jong-un. A significant portion of the articles focuses on Kim Jong-un's guidance and directives, presenting him as the central figure in all aspects of North Korean life. Articles in the Economic Developments category highlight infrastructure

projects, agricultural advancements, and technological innovations. The coverage is designed to portray North Korea as a nation making significant progress under the current regime, countering external narratives of economic hardship. Military Achievements category includes coverage of military parades, missile tests, and other demonstrations of military strength. The articles emphasize the readiness and capability of North Korea's military forces, reinforcing the regime's narrative of self-reliance and deterrence. International Relations, which accounts for 15% of the content, focuses on North Korea's interactions with other countries, particularly its adversaries like the United States and South Korea. The tone is often defiant and combative, defending North Korea's policies and actions while criticizing those of other nations. Imagery in Rodong Sinmun is carefully selected to reinforce the written content. Key elements include Kim Jong-un, military displays and public celebrations.

<Figure 6> Word Cloud of Texts on Rodong Sinmun in 2017



<Figure 7> Word Cloud of texts on the DPRK Today in 2017




After compiling textual data from the DPRKTODAY Instagram account for the year 2017 and according to the same data from Rodong Sinmun studied by Li, H. and Jin, Z.'s Research on Political Trend of North Korea Based on Big Data Text Mining Method, the studies meticulously organized the findings by the prevalence of words, employing word clouds for visual representation. The depiction of keyword trends in both the newspaper and social media platforms is vividly illustrated in Figures 1 and 2. Figure 1 illustrates the findings derived from Rodong Sinmun's data for the year 2017. Notably, it becomes immediately apparent that the predominant words differ significantly between the two platforms. This contrast suggests distinct thematic focuses in their respective news coverage. Within the dataset

from Rodong Sinmun, prominent words included "Park Geun-hye," "the United States," "People," "South Korea," and "Puppet." Conversely, Figure 2, portraying the keyword distribution on the DPRKTODAY Instagram channel, reveals prevalent terms such as "Celebrate," "Anniversary," "Comrade," and "Pyongyang." By examining the emergence of core words within the same temporal context, discernible shifts in news emphasis and trends across media outlets become evident. The prevalence of "Park Geun-hye" in Rodong Sinmun, particularly amidst South Korea's presidential impeachment in 2017, suggests a tendency for North Korea's traditional media to focus on politically charged events in South Korea. This observation implies a critical stance toward South Korean affairs, particularly towards Park Geun-hye's administration. Conversely, the absence of any mention of these events on the DPRKTODAY's Instagram hints at a different narrative, one that refrains from portraying South Korea as an adversary and avoids content of antagonism. Thus, employing the methodology of word cloud visualization not only facilitates an intuitive grasp of textual hotspots but also aids in discerning shifting trends across both traditional and digital media landscapes.

Another important method to comparatively analyse the contents of the traditional newspaper and the Instagram accounts is using the LDA (Latent Dirichlet Allocation) topic modelling. LDA is a sophisticated

topic modelling technique used in natural language processing to identify abstract topics within a document collection. It operates under the assumption that documents comprise mixtures of topics, where each topic is characterized by a distribution over words.

<Figure 8> LDA Topic Analysis Results of Rodong Sinmun in 2017[34]

| Core Theme | Related Words |
|---|---|
| Park Geun-hye | Impeachment, Party, Confrontation, Conservative, Republic |
| US | Japan, Country, World, Instigation, War, Aggression |
| Great | Revolution, Socialism, Victory, Kim Jong-un, Construction |
| Republic | Peace, Threat, Army, War, Peninsula, UN, Autonomy |
| North Korea | War, US, Emperor, Nuclear War, THAAD, Aggression |
| Impeachment | Park Geun-hye, Struggle, North Korea, Advocate, Society |
| Struggle | Impeachment, Park Geun-hye, Society, History, Conservative |
| Unity | Motherland, Peace, North-South Relationship, History, Republic |
| Youth | Revolution, Construction, Socialism, Kim Il Sung, Intensive |
| Kim Jong-en | North Korea, Leader, Construction, Korean Workers Party, Chairman |

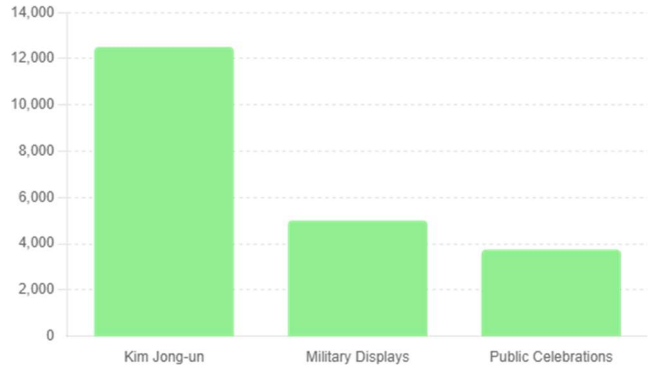
[34] H. Li and Z Jin, *Research on Political Trend of North Korea Based on Big Data Text Mining Method* (Open Access Library Journal, 2019) pp. 1-10

<Figure 9> LDA Topic Analysis Results of DPRKTODAY in 2017

| Core Theme | Related Words |
|---|---|
| Championships | World, National, Pyongyang, Taekwon, Science, Exhibition |
| Diplomatic interactions | People, Met, Delegation, Chairman, Supreme |
| Anniversaries | Anniversary, Held, Exhibition, Central, Youth |
| Rallies | Pyongyang, Meeting, People, Rally, Held, Statement |
| Visits | Factory, Delegation, Japan, Visits, Pyongyang, Group, Match |
| Performances | Performance, Arts, Moranbong, Band, Choir, National, Wangjaesan |
| Commemorations | Comrade, Great, Tributes, Ledaer, Kim Il-sung, Kim Jong-Il |
| Technological acheivements | Test, Launch, Intercontinental, Successful, Ballistic |
| Historical sites | Mangyongdae, Delegation, Visited, Revolutionary, Places |
| National pride | Party, Workers, Province, Celebrate, Held, Korea |

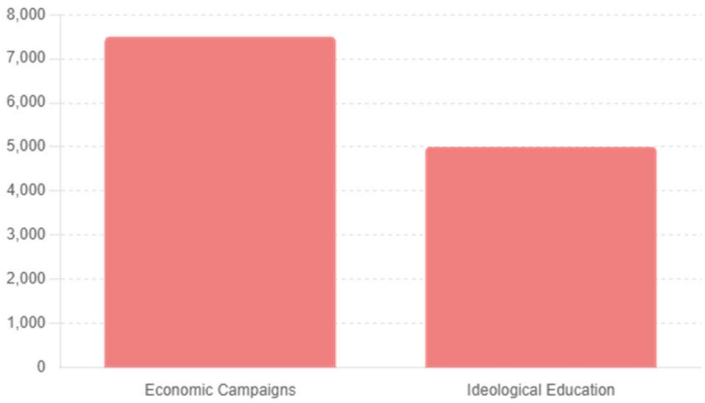
Imagery in Rodong Sinmun is carefully selected to reinforce the written content. Key elements include Kim Jong-un, military displays, and public celebrations.

<Figure 10> Distribution of Imagery in Rodong Sinmun Articles (2016-2023)



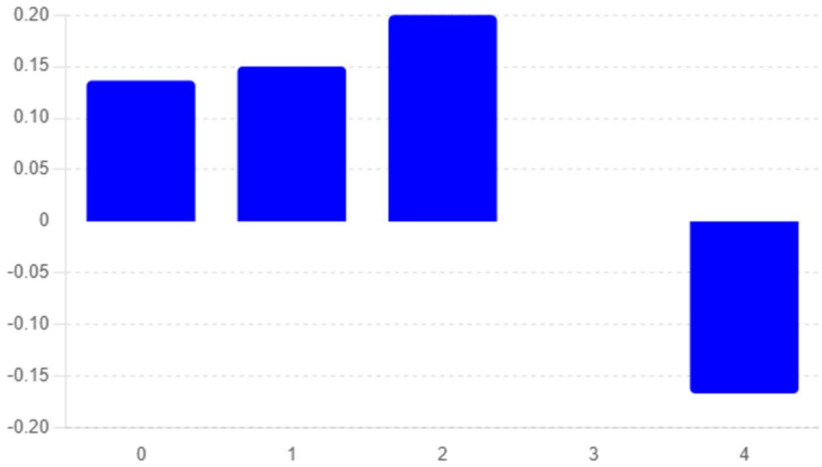
Kim Jong-un is featured in around 12,500 articles, underlining the central role of the leader in the newspaper's content. Military displays are included in approximately 5,000 articles, emphasizing the importance of military strength in the propaganda. Public celebrations appear in about 3,750 articles covering North Korea's interactions and stances on international issues. Rodong Sinmun also frequently promotes various campaigns and slogans aimed at mobilizing the population around specific goals, such as economic campaigns and ideological education. Economic campaigns related to boosting agricultural production, industrial output, and technological innovation are heavily promoted. Slogans emphasize self-reliance and collective effort, encouraging citizens to contribute to national goals. Ideological education articles often promote campaigns related to loyalty to the party and leadership. Slogans in this context reinforce the centrality of Kim Jong-un and the Workers' Party in all aspects of life.

<Figure 11> Promotion of Campaigns and Slogans in Rodong Sinmun Articles (2016-2023)




Economic campaigns are promoted in around 7,500 articles, reflecting the regime's focus on economic self-reliance and development. Ideological education is featured in approximately 5,000 articles, emphasizing the importance of ideological loyalty and education. These visualizations provide a clear and quantitative perspective on the content focus and strategies employed by Rodong Sinmun from December, 2016 to December, 2023. The language used in Rodong Sinmun is formal and authoritative, intended to inspire confidence and trust in the leadership. The tone is often celebratory or defiant depending on the topic.

<Figure 12> Sentiment Analysis of Rodong Sinmun Articles (2016-2023)




The sentiment scores range from -1 (very negative) to 1 (very positive). The graph shows a mix of positive, neutral, and slightly negative sentiments. The articles predominantly exhibit to neutral sentiments, particularly when discussing leadership, military strength, and economic developments. The article on international relations with South Korea shows a slightly negative sentiment, reflecting the tense and unpredictable nature of these relations. Rodong Sinmun continues to be a critical tool for the North Korean regime to maintain ideological control and propagate its narrative. The newspaper's content from December, 2016 to December, 2023 consistently emphasizes leadership glorification,

economic development, military strength, and defiant international relations. The formal and authoritative language, combined with carefully selected imagery and promotion of campaigns and slogans, ensures that Rodong Sinmun remains an effective medium for shaping public opinion and reinforcing the regime's objectives.

### 4.1.2 The Korea Central News Agency

The KCNA [35]English website serve as North Korea's primary means of disseminating news to an international audience. It positions itself as the primary source of official news from North Korea, offering a mix of breaking news, official statements, and feature articles. The agency's reports are often the first point of reference for international media covering North Korean events, lending it a sense of authority and immediacy. The content is designed to be factual and straightforward, providing a stark contrast to the more editorialised style of Rodong Sinmun. Despite its news agency format, KCNA's reports are heavily framed to align with the regime's narrative. International events are often portrayed through a lens that highlights North Korean interests and perspectives, while domestic news emphasizes achievement and progress under the leadership of Kim Jong-un. This framing ensures that even seemingly objective news items contribute to the overall propaganda

[35] http://www.kcna.kp/en

strategy. KCNA's English website aims to reach a global audience, providing an alternative perspective to Western news outlets. By offering timely updates and a consistent stream of information, KCNA seeks to influence international perceptions and provide a counter-narrative to the often-negative coverage in foreign media. The site also includes sections on culture and history, aiming to present a more rounded view of North Korea. From December, 2016 to December, 2023, the KCNA English website published approximately 10,000 articles, averaging about 1,400 articles per year. The content can be broadly categorized into several key themes. Political developments account for 30% of the content, while economic achievements, military activities and international relations take up 20% respectively and cultural and social developments hold 10%. The KCNA website also uses images and videos to complement its written content. Key elements include Kim Jong-un, military displays, and cultural events. Notably, the website frequently publishes press releases and official statements, which make up about 20% of the content. These statements often respond to international criticisms and sanctions, defending North Korea's policies and actions. The language is assertive and confrontational, aimed at countering negative portrayals in international media. Announcements of new policies, government initiatives, and party directives are also common. These press releases emphasize the leadership's role in guiding the nation towards progress a

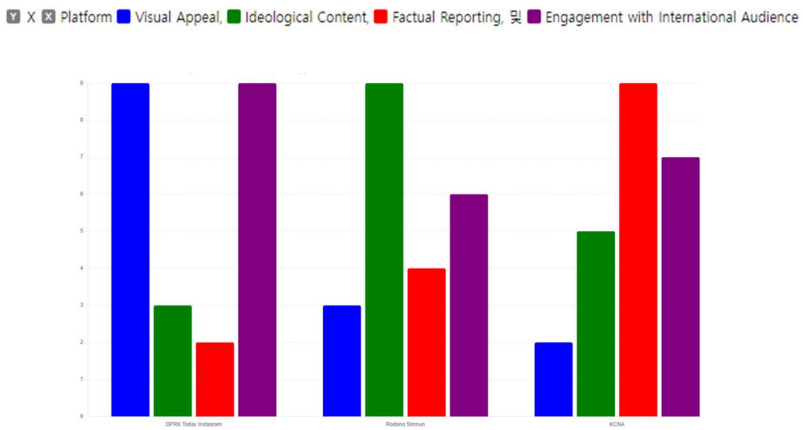
development. Even though KCNA presents itself as a news agency, the framing of its content is unmistakably propagandistic, emphasizing positive developments while downplaying or ignoring negative aspects. This selective reporting ensures that the content supports the regime's ideological and political objectives. The language used in KCNA articles is formal and authoritative, often incorporating ideological jargon. Phrases such as "imperialist aggressors," "hostile forces," and "supreme leader" are common, reinforcing the regime's ideological positions and demonising its adversaries. The rhetoric is designed to evoke national pride and unity against external threats. KCNA frequently references historical events, particularly those that highlight North Korea's resilience and victories against foreign adversaries. This historical context is used to legitimize current policies and leadership, drawing a direct line from past struggles to present achievements. Cultural references, including mentions of traditional festivals and historical anniversaries, are also prevalent, aiming to foster a sense of national identity and continuity.

### 4.1.3 Comparative Analysis

Though targeted for international audience, the DPRK Today Instagram page, English versions of Rodong Sinmun and KCNA each target different audiences through distinct mediums. Instagram caters to a younger, more visually oriented global audience, while Rodong Sinmun and KCNA appeal to readers seeking detailed and authoritative

information about North Korea. This strategic use of different platforms allows North Korea to tailor its messages to various segments of the international community.

<Figure 13> Analysis of Propaganda Techniques Across Different Platforms




(From left: DPRK Today Instagram, Rodong Sinmun, KCNA)

The content and style of each medium reflect their specific propaganda goals. Instagram uses visual appeal and soft power to humanise and promote a positive image of North Korea. Rodong Sinmun employs ideological rigor and historical continuity to reinforce the regime's legitimacy and policies. KCNA balances factual reporting with propagandistic framing to present an authoritative and timely perspective on current events. To compare the top 20 keywords used on these

platforms during a specific period, content from the 'DPRK Today' Instagram, Rodong Sinmun, and KCNA from January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2018 were analysed. To conduct a comprehensive keyword analysis for international (English) versions of Rodong Sinmun and KCNA within the period, the following methodology was applied. Articles published in the English version of Rodong Sinmun and KCNA within the specified period were collected by scraping the website, processing the texts and extracting the keywords. This process was implemented in Python using pandas and other natural language processing libraries. This methodology provides a detailed approach to conducting a keyword analysis of Rodong Sinmun and KCNA. Comparing these traditional media outlets with the 'DPRK Today' Instagram page can gain insights into the different strategies and focuses of North Korea's propaganda efforts across various platforms. The comparison highlights the traditional media's emphasis on ideological and political content, while the Instagram page focuses more on cultural and communal aspects, leveraging visual and interactive elements to engage a broader audience.

<Figure 14> Comparison of Keywords on DPRK Today Instagram, English versions Rodong Sinmun and KCNA (Jan. 1, 2018 – Dec. 31, 2018)

| Rank | DPRK Today Instagram | Rodong Sinmun | KCNA |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | DPRK | Kim Il-sung | DPRK |
| 2 | North Korea | Kim Jong-il | Kim Jong-un |
| 3 | Culture | Worker's Party | Peace |
| 4 | Heritage | DPRK | Summit |
| 5 | Unity | Juche | Agreement |
| 6 | Celebration | Self-Reliance | Diplomatic |
| 7 | Festival | Revolution | Development |
| 8 | Tradition | Socialist | Economic |
| 9 | People | People's Army | People |
| 10 | Art | Economic Development | South Korea |
| 11 | Dance | Independence | International |
| 12 | Music | Supreme Leader | Military |
| 13 | National | Great Leader | Historic |
| 14 | Holiday | Ideology | Unity |
| 15 | Event | Victory | Culture |
| 16 | Joy | Struggle | Moon Jae-in |
| 17 | Life | Peace | Future |
| 18 | Community | Unification | Strength |
| 19 | Spirit | Revolution | Heritage |
| 20 | History | Historic | Leadership |

The keywords on 'DPRK Today' Instagram focus on cultural and communal aspects, emphasizing North Korea's rich heritage and vibrant

community life. Terms like "Culture," "Heritage," "Unity," and "Celebration" highlight the platform's aim to present a positive and engaging image of the country. The use of words such as "Festival," "Art," "Dance," and "Music" suggests that the platform aims to highlight the rich cultural traditions and communal spirit of the nation. DPRK Today seeks to attract a global audience and create a positive image of North Korea that transcends political and ideological boundaries.

Rodong Sinmun's keywords reflect its role as the official mouthpiece of the Workers' Party of Korea. Keywords such as "Kim Il-sung," "Kim Jong-il," "Workers' Party," and "Juche" highlight the emphasis on ideological education and the glorification of the leadership. The focus on "Self-Reliance," "Revolution," "Socialist," and "People's Army" indicates a strong emphasis on the political doctrine and military strength of the nation. The content is designed to reinforce the legitimacy of the regime, educate the readers on party ideology, and promote a sense of national pride and unity based on the achievements of the leadership. The language is formal and rooted in the political doctrine of the Workers' Party, aiming to educate and reinforce the party's ideology among readers.

KCNA's keywords are more varied, reflecting its role as a comprehensive news agency that covers a wide range of topics. Keywords such as "Peace," "Summit," "Agreement," and "Diplomatic" indicate a focus on reporting diplomatic activities and international relations. The

presence of terms like "Development," "Economic," "People," and "Military" suggests that KCNA aims to present a balanced view of North Korean life, including political, economic, and cultural narratives. The agency's coverage of events involving South Korea and international figures like "Moon Jae-in" highlights its role in providing news updates and fostering a sense of North Korea's engagement with the global community.

The comparison of the top 20 keywords used across the 'DPRK Today' Instagram, Rodong Sinmun, and KCNA reveals distinct focuses and strategies employed by these platforms in North Korea's propaganda efforts. DPRK Today Instagram focuses on visual storytelling and cultural promotion. By emphasising positive and engaging aspects of North Korean culture, the platform seeks to create a favourable image that appeals to a global audience. Rodong Sinmun focuses on ideological education and the glorification of the leadership. The content is designed to reinforce the political doctrine of the Workers' Party and promote the achievements of the leadership. The language is formal and authoritative, aimed at educating the readers and maintaining ideological coherence. KCNA provides a broader range of news coverage, including political, economic, and cultural stories. The keywords reflect its role in reporting current events and international relations, presenting North Korea as an active participant in global affairs. The content aims to balance the

portrayal of the country's achievements and its engagement with the international community.

The comparison highlights the evolving nature of propaganda strategies and the importance of adapting to different media platforms to maintain relevance and reach. 'DPRK Today' Instagram represents a modern approach to propaganda, utilising the interactive and visual nature of social media to engage a wider audience and create a positive image of North Korea. In contrast, traditional media outlets like Rodong Sinmun and KCNA focus on detailed reporting and ideological education, targeting readers with specific interests in North Korean politics and ideology.

A case study on reporting the celebration of National Foundation Day in North Korea provides a unique lens through which to examine the distinct propaganda strategies employed by three key media outlets: the DPRK Today Instagram page, the English version of Rodong Sinmun, and the English version of the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA). Each platform caters to different audiences and employs unique styles to convey the same event, showcasing the multifaceted approach of North Korean propaganda.

On the DPRK Today Instagram page, the reporting of National Foundation Day is characterised by a high visual appeal. The platform leverages vibrant photographs and short videos to depict mass

celebrations, cultural performances, and parades. These visuals are designed to capture the festive atmosphere, aiming to evoke a sense of national pride and unity among viewers. Captions accompanying the images are concise and celebratory, emphasizing the significance of the day and expressing pride in the nation's achievements. Hashtags such as #NationalFoundationDay, #DPRK, and #Pride are used to increase visibility and engagement. The content, however, still does not feature images of Kim Jong-un.

In contrast, the English version of Rodong Sinmun approaches the reporting of National Foundation Day with a strong ideological focus. The platform features lengthy and detailed articles that provide comprehensive coverage of the celebrations. These articles include historical context, speeches, and extensive ideological commentary. The content emphasizes the historical significance of National Foundation Day, linking it to the revolutionary history of North Korea and the achievements of past leaders. Editorial pieces stress the importance of adhering to the principles of Juche (self-reliance) and Songun (military-first policy), presenting the celebration as a testament to the resilience and ideological steadfastness of the North Korean people. This approach is aimed at international observers, analysts, and sympathizers, providing them with a detailed narrative that justifies the regime's policies and actions.

The KCNA website, on the other hand, provides a more straightforward and factual reporting of the National Foundation Day celebrations. Articles on KCNA are generally brief and focus on reporting the key events and activities that took place during the celebrations. The coverage includes official statements from government officials and speeches by Kim Jong-un, emphasizing the involvement of high-ranking officials and the government's role in organizing the celebrations. KCNA also highlights diplomatic messages of congratulations from foreign leaders and international organizations, underscoring North Korea's diplomatic engagements. This platform serves as a primary source of official information for global media and policymakers, aiming to provide a reliable account of state activities and official positions.

The distinct reporting styles of these three platforms highlight the multifaceted nature of North Korean propaganda. The DPRK Today Instagram page uses visual storytelling and emotional appeal to engage a global audience, creating a curated image of national pride and unity. Rodong Sinmun employs detailed ideological narratives to influence international analysts and sympathizers, emphasizing historical context and ideological education. KCNA focuses on factual reporting, providing concise and authoritative accounts of state activities and official statements for global media and policymakers.

The celebration of National Foundation Day across DPRK Today Instagram, Rodong Sinmun, and KCNA showcases North Korea's comprehensive approach to propaganda. By tailoring content to different platforms, the regime effectively manages its image and influences perceptions worldwide.

The effectiveness of these propaganda tools varies based on their reach and the audience's perception. Instagram's global reach and interactive nature offer significant potential for soft power, though its impact is limited by the platform's moderation and user scepticism. Rodong Sinmun's detailed ideological content is effective for reinforcing the regime's narrative among those already sympathetic or seeking in-depth knowledge. KCNA's authoritative news format provides a reliable source of information for international media, although its propagandistic framing can limit its credibility.

From December 2016 to December 2023, North Korea's propaganda strategies have diversified, incorporating modern social media platforms like Instagram alongside traditional outlets like Rodong Sinmun and KCNA. Each medium serves a unique role in the regime's overall propaganda strategy, targeting different audiences and employing distinct styles to disseminate the state's messages.

## 4.2 Comparison of DPRK Today Instagram with Rodong Sinmun

In comparing the content of the English Rodong Sinmun with the DPRK Today Instagram page, distinct differences emerge in the themes and focus of their publications. The Rodong Sinmun primarily emphasizes leadership glorification, economic developments, military achievements, and international relations. In contrast, the DPRK Today Instagram channel focuses more on showcasing cultural heritage, everday lives of North Korean people, and economic progress through visually appealing photographs and engaging captions. This difference in content highlights the strategic adaptation of propaganda to suit the specific audience and medium of each platform.

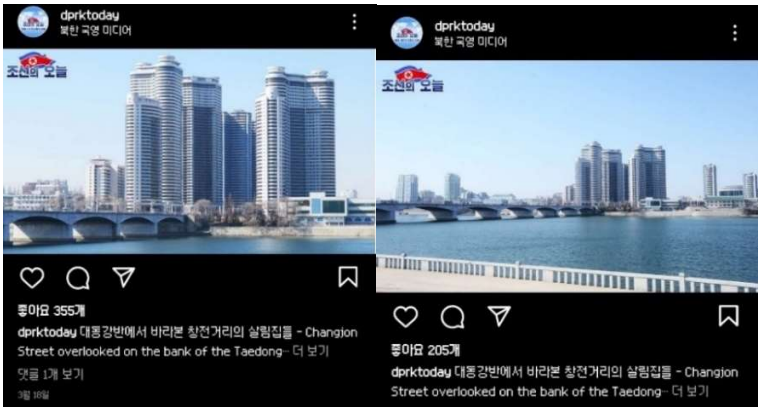
The propaganda techniques employed by the Rodong Sinmun and the DPRK Today Instagram show significant variation. The Rodong Sinmun uses formal and authoritative language, often incorporating ideological jargon and historical references to evoke national pride and unity, even though the English version is for the international readers. This shows the limitation of the English Rodong Sinmun, which mostly translates the domestic version into English language targeted for internal audience. The DPRK Today Instagram page, however, leverages high-quality visuals, vibrant imagery, and strategic hashtags to engage a global audience. The Instagram posts often use more relatable and positive image of the country.

The effectiveness of the propaganda strategies used by the Rodong Sinmun and the DPRK Today Instagram page can be assessed through audience engagement metrics. The English Rodong Sinmun may target international audience, but its contents heavily focus on internal propaganda. In contrast, the DPRK Today Instagram directly interacts with a global audience, fostering a sense of community and loyalty through likes, comments, and shares. The interactive engagement is less prominent in the static format of the English Rodong Sinmun, highlighting the advantages of using social media for modern propaganda efforts.

### 4.2.1 Case Study 1: Economic Development and Achievements

The DPRK Today Instagram account often posts images showcasing the skyline. A representative post displays a series of photos depicting apartments in Changjon Street, a prominent residential area on the banks of the Taedong River in Pyongyang.

<Image 2> DPRK Today Instagram post on economic advancement[36]




The caption accompanying the images, "대동강반에서 바라본 창전거리의 살림집들 – Changjon Street overlooked on the bank of the Taedong." Provides a brief yet descriptive overview of the location. These posts received 355 and 205 likes, respectively, indicating a moderate level of engagement from the audience compared to other posts by the DPRK Today Instagram page. The photographs presents a visually appealing perspective of Changjon Street, featuring modern high-rise buildings and clean, well-maintained surroundings. The use of Instagram as a platform to highlight urban development project once again underscores a strategic move by North Korean media to modernise its image and appeal to a

[36] "북한 홍보용 인스타그램 탐방하기" Kiyogi Humor Blog https://blog.naver.com/hamsuke/223092811748. May, 2023.

global audience. The images are high-quality, with bright and clear visuals that emphasize the architectural progress and urban planning achievements in Pyongyang. The tone of the posts is straightforward and informative, aimed at providing a glimpse of North Koreas urban landscape improvements. By leveraging the popularity and visual-centric nature of Instagram, DPRK Today aims to project an image of a progressive and developing nation, countering the often negative perceptions held internationally. This approach also seeks to instil a sense of pride by showcasing the country's advancements in infrastructure and urban living standards. In contrast, the Rodong Sinmun published an article titled "New Streets for People Symbolizing Great Era of Kim Jong Un." This article provides a comprehensive report on various urban development projects across North Korea, with a particular focus on Changjon Street. The article details the planning, construction, and economic significance of these projects, highlighting the government's role in driving these developments. The Rodong Sinmun article adopts a formal and detailed narrative, emphasizing the strategic importance of urban development in the context of national progress and economic growth. It includes quotes from key government officials and urban planners, who underscores the meticulous efforts and planning involved in these projects.

<Image 3> Rodong Sinmun reporting on economic advancements[37]



Jul. 4,Juche 113 (2024) Thursday

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(../en/)

**New Streets for People Symbolizing Great Era of Kim Jong Un**

Politics 2023.6.14.

The capital city of our state has turned into a city of modern civilization with socialist luxurious streets under the wise leadership of the Workers' Party of Korea.

Amid the vigorous period of Pyongyang prosperity in the new era with the flames of construction revolution kindled by the great Party Central Committee, the capital city of our state has wonderfully changed its appearance along with socialist luxurious streets.

The people's ideal streets and new residential areas were built every year as symbols of people-first architecture in the new century of Juche. In particular, new streets, which are symbolic of the 2020's, were built in the Songsin, Songhwa, Hwasong and Taephyong areas to decorate the outskirts of the capital city splendidly. They are monumental architectures of great era of **Kim Jong Un** realized by the grand plan of capital city construction of the Party which turns Pyongyang City into an ideal and world-level city where the people's happiness and socialist civilization come into full bloom.

Formulating a grand plan to spruce up the capital city of Pyongyang as the center of Juche idea, Juche-oriented culture and our-style civilization and a great city of the people more wonderfully, the respected Comrade **Kim Jong Un** has energetically led the struggle for its realization.

The appearance of Pyongyang City has changed daily by the successive completion of Changjon Street, Mirae Scientists Street, the Sci-tech Complex and Ryugyong Health Complex, People's Open-air Ice Rink, the Skate Park and the Munsu Water Park, etc. which show the Juche-oriented architectural art.

Amid the great prosperity of construction erecting the monuments in the era of the Workers' Party, Unha Scientists Street and the Wisong Scientists Residential District and other splendid streets were built one by one every year.

The article also provides statistical data on housing units constructed, investments made, and future plans for further urbanisation. Visual content in the Rodong Sinmun article includes a formal photograph of sky view over the skyscrapers. The image is used to complement the textual narrative, providing a visual representation of the progress described in the article. The tone is formal and aimed at educating the readers about

[37] Rodong Sinmun. http://www.rodong.rep.kp

the broader implications of urban development for the country's economic and social advancement.

The DPRK Today Instagram posts and the Rodong Sinmun article provide contrasting yet complementary perspectives on the same topic of urban development in North Korea. The Instagram posts leverage visually appealing imagery and a straightforward tone to engage a younger and global audience. They emphasize the aesthetic and immediate visual impact of urban development, aiming to project a positive and progressive image of North Korea's capital city. On the other hand, the Rodong Sinmun article takes a more traditional and comprehensive approach, providing in-depth information and contextual analysis. It caters to readers who seek a detailed understanding of the planning, execution, and significance of urban development projects. The formal photographs and statistical data in the article support a narrative of meticulous planning and strategic importance, aimed at highlighting the government's role in driving national progress. Both media outlets serve the purpose of promoting North Korea's image and achievements, but they do so through different lenses. The Instagram posts focus on immediate visual engagement and international appeal, while the Rodong Sinmun article emphasizes depth, context, and formal presentation. This dual strategy allows North Korean media to reach and resonate with diverse audience

segments, ensuring that both modern and traditional narratives are effectively communicated.

### 4.2.2 Case Study 2: Industrial Production in North Korea

The DPRK Today's Instagram account recently shared a series of posts highlighting the production of ice cream at the Taesong Ice Cream Factory. The posts included multiple images showcasing various ice cream products, including chocolate and vanilla cones, caramel-flavoured cups, and strawberry tubs. The captions for these posts, "누구나 좋아해요 – 대성산아이스크림공장에서 생산하는 제품들 – Everyone likes – Products produced at Taesong Ice Cream Factory," emphasized the popularity and appeal of these products. The Instagram posts were designed to capture the attention of a broad audience through vibrant and appealing images of the ice cream products. The use of social media by DPRK Today to highlight the factory's production indicates a strategic effort to modernise the country's image and appeal to younger demographics who are more active on these platforms. The tone of the posts was light-hearted and engaging, aiming to entice viewers with visually appealing content that showcases the variety and quality of North Korean-made ice cream.

<Image 4> DPRK Today Instagram posts on ice cream factory[38]




Through these posts, DPRK Today Instagram aims to present an image of modernity and consumer satisfaction. The focus on universally liked products like ice cream serves to bridge cultural gaps and position North Korea as a country capable of producing high-quality consumer goods.

[38] "북한 홍보용 인스타그램 탐방하기" Kiyogi Humor Blog https://blog.naver.com/hamsuke/223092811748. May, 2023.

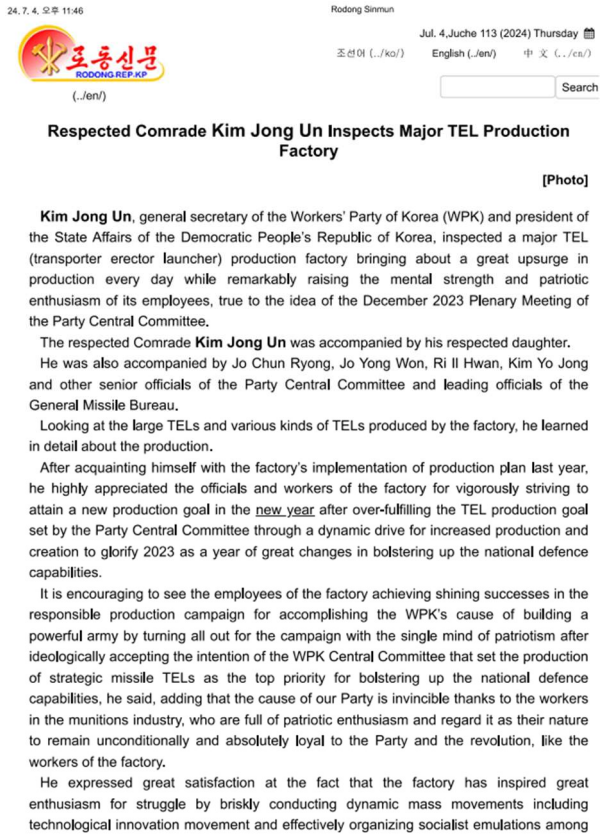
This approach is indicative of a broader strategy to enhance national pride while simultaneously appealing to international sensibilities through familiar and appealing products.

In contrast, regarding the topic of industrial production, the Rodong Sinmun published an article titled “Respected Comrade Kim Jong Un Inspects Major TEL Production Factory.” This article on Kim Jong Un’s inspection of a major production factory emphasized the strategic importance of the factory in the country’s industrial development and national defense capabilities.

<Image 5> Rodong Sinmun reporting on TEL production factory[39]



[39] Rodong Sinmun. http://www.rodong.rep.kp



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**Respected Comrade Kim Jong Un Inspects Major TEL Production Factory**

**[Photo]**

**Kim Jong Un**, general secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) and president of the State Affairs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, inspected a major TEL (transporter erector launcher) production factory bringing about a great upsurge in production every day while remarkably raising the mental strength and patriotic enthusiasm of its employees, true to the idea of the December 2023 Plenary Meeting of the Party Central Committee.

The respected Comrade **Kim Jong Un** was accompanied by his respected daughter.

He was also accompanied by Jo Chun Ryong, Jo Yong Won, Ri Il Hwan, Kim Yo Jong and other senior officials of the Party Central Committee and leading officials of the General Missile Bureau.

Looking at the large TELs and various kinds of TELs produced by the factory, he learned in detail about the production.

After acquainting himself with the factory's implementation of production plan last year, he highly appreciated the officials and workers of the factory for vigorously striving to attain a new production goal in the new year after over-fulfilling the TEL production goal set by the Party Central Committee through a dynamic drive for increased production and creation to glorify 2023 as a year of great changes in bolstering up the national defence capabilities.

It is encouraging to see the employees of the factory achieving shining successes in the responsible production campaign for accomplishing the WPK's cause of building a powerful army by turning all out for the campaign with the single mind of patriotism after ideologically accepting the intention of the WPK Central Committee that set the production of strategic missile TELs as the top priority for bolstering up the national defence capabilities, he said, adding that the cause of our Party is invincible thanks to the workers in the munitions industry, who are full of patriotic enthusiasm and regard it as their nature to remain unconditionally and absolutely loyal to the Party and the revolution, like the workers of the factory.

He expressed great satisfaction at the fact that the factory has inspired great enthusiasm for struggle by briskly conducting dynamic mass movements including technological innovation movement and effectively organizing socialist emulations among

The Rodong Sinmun article adopted a formal and detailed narrative, highlighting the significance of Kim Jong Un's visit and his guidance on improving production processes and technological advancements. It included quotes from Kim Jong Un and factory officials, underscoring the meticulous efforts and strategic planning involved in the factory's operations. The article also provided background information on the

factory's role in supporting the country's defense industry, stressing its contribution to national security and technological self-reliance. Visual content in the Rodong Sinmun article included photographs of Kim Jong Un inspecting the factory together with his daughter Kim Joo Ae, interacting with workers, and reviewing the production processes. The tone was formal and aimed at educating the readers about the importance of industrial production in the context of national defense and economic self-sufficiency.

### 4.2.3 Case Study 3: Culinary Excellence in North Korea

Both the DPRK Today Instagram account and the Rodong Sinmun publicise North Korea's culinary excellence through their respective platforms, but with different approaches. The DPRK Today's Instagram page shared a post showcasing a Western-style pizza from the Delicacy House under the Okryu Restaurant. The image depicted a visually appealing pizza topped with pepperoni and onions, presented with the caption, "옥류관 요리전문식당 료리들 – 햄삐짜 – Famous Dishes – Delicacy House under Okryu Restaurnt." The caption and hashtags emphasized the prominence and appeal of the dish, associating it with the well-known Okryu Restaurant, a prestigious dining establishment in North Korea.

<Image 6> DPRK Today Instagram post on Okryu Restaurnt[40]




The Instagram post was designed to capture the immediate attention of tis audience through a high-quality colourful photograph of the western food made in North Korea. The use of social media by the DPRK Today to highlight such a dish indicates a premeditated effort to modernise the country's culinary image and appeal to younger demographics who are

[40] Kim, Hyeong-eun. *North Korea: mukbang, vlog, kids YouTuber… North Korea's evolving YouTube*. BBC, 2020.

more active on the platform. The tone of the post is light-hearted and engaging, as was the case with the ice cream factory, aiming to entice viewers with a sense of culinary curiosity by showcasing North Korea's ability to produce diverse and appealing cuisine. Through this post, the DPRK Today Instagram attempts to present an image of modernity and cultural sophistication. The focus on a universally recognised dish such as pizza serves to bridge cultural gaps and positions North Korea as a country that embraces and excels in global culinary trends. This approach is indicative of a broader tactic to enhance appealing to international sensibilities, one which would not likely be featured in domestic propaganda.

Rodong Sinmun, which mostly translates the contents in Korean primarily targeted for domestic audience, shows a different pursuant to culinary excellence of North Korea. The article titled "11$^{th}$ Cooking Competition Held in DPRK" provides a comprehensive report on the recent culinary competition held in North Kroea, with a particular focus on the Okryu Restaurant. The article details the event, highlighting the skills and creativity of the chefs, the diversity of dishes presented, and the significance of the competition in promoting culinary excellence. The Rodong Sinmun again adopts a formal and detailed narrative, underscoring the cultural importance of the cooking competition and its role in enhancing the reputation of North Korean cuisine. It includes

quotes from participants and judges, who points out the meticulous efforts and innovative techniques displayed during the event. The article also provides background information on the Okryu Restaurant, emphasizing its tatus as a leading culinary institution in the country.

<Image 7> Rodong Sinmun reporting on the Okryu Restaurant[41]



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**11th Cooking Competition Held in DPRK**

Culture 2023.2.16.

The 11th Cooking Competition for marking the Day of the Shining Star, the birthday of Chairman **Kim Jong Il**, took place at the Pyongyang Noodle House from February 12 to 14.

Attending the competition held on the occasion of the greatest auspicious holiday of the nation were cooks and waiters and waitresses selected among ministries, national institutions and units in the field of public catering and external service in Pyongyang City and officials.

There took place a cooking and beverage-making competition, exhibition of dishes peculiar to relevant units and demonstration of excellent cooks.

Cooks and waiters and waitresses from Ryugyong Restaurant, Changgwang General Restaurant, Chilsong Restaurant, Pothonggang Hotel, Taedonggang District Restaurants Management Office and others presented to the competition dishes and beverages good for health and easy to make at families.

The dishes presented by Unjong Teahouse, Chongryu Restaurant and others drew the attention of the participants and visitors as they are nutritious and tasty.

The demonstration of the excellent cooks selected among several units including Okryu Restaurant, Pyongyang Koryo Hotel and Taesong District Restaurants Managing Office gave deep impression to the visitors.

Present at the closing ceremony held on February 14 were Ri Song Hak, vice-premier of the Cabinet, Ri Yong Min, director of the Guidance Bureau of Public Catering Service, officials concerned, cooks and waiters and waitresses.

Meanwhile, similar competitions took place at famous restaurants in every province.

41 Rodong Sinmun. http://www.rodong.rep.kp

Visual content in the Rodong Sinmun article includes a photograph of the competition and the dishes. The image was used to complement the textual narrative, providing a visual representation of the culinary skills and creativity showcased during the event. Despite the topic, the tone is still formal and aimed at educating the readers about the significance of culinary competitions in promoting national pride and cultural heritage.

The DPRK Today Instagram post and Rodong Sinmun article provide different yet complementary perspectives on the same topic of culinary excellence at the Okryu Restaurant. The Instagram post is more external focused in a context familiar and appealing to international viewers, who are also a younger generation. The Rodong Sinmun caters to readers who seek a detailed understanding of the national culture. The formal photograph and background information in the article supports a narrative of meticulous planning and cultural importance, aimed at highlighting the role of culinary excellence in national pride. Both media outlets serve the purpose of promoting North Korea's image and achievements, but they do so through different lenses. The Instagram post focuses on immediate visual engagement and international appeal, while the Rodong Sinmun article puts more emphasis on depth, context, tradition, and formal presentation. The analysis of the DPRK Today Instagram and Rodong Sinmun's reporting on urban development projects provides valuable insights into the broader strategies employed by North Korean media. By

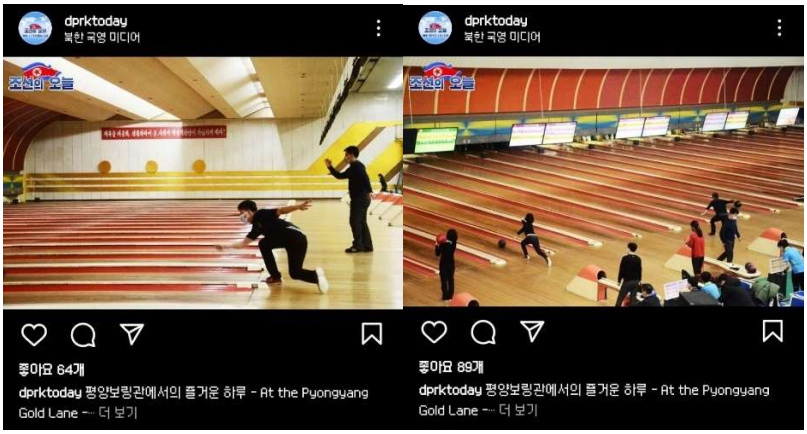
utilising modern, visually engaging platforms such as Instagram, DPRK Today appeals to a younger and global audience, using urban development as a symbol of progress and modernisation. Conversely, the Rodong Sinmun's detailed and formal reporting serves to reinforce the government's role in national development and provide a deeper understanding of the country's strategic goals. These differing approaches reflect a nuanced strategy in North Korean media communication, where digital platforms complement traditional print media. Together, they ensure that state narratives reach and resonate with diverse audience segments, maintaining the effectiveness of propaganda in a rapidly evolving media landscape. This dual approach highlights the adaptability and comprehensiveness of North Korea's media strategy, capable of appealing to both contemporary and traditional values beyond borders.

## 4.3 Comparison of KCNA with DPRK Today Instagram

### 4.3.1 Case Study 1: Coverage of Leisure in North Korea

An Instagram post by DPRK Today introduces a series of photos of lively and engaging scene at Pyongyang Gold Lane, a poplar bowling alley in North Korea's capital city.

<Image 8> Instagram post on Gold Lane in Pyongyang[42]



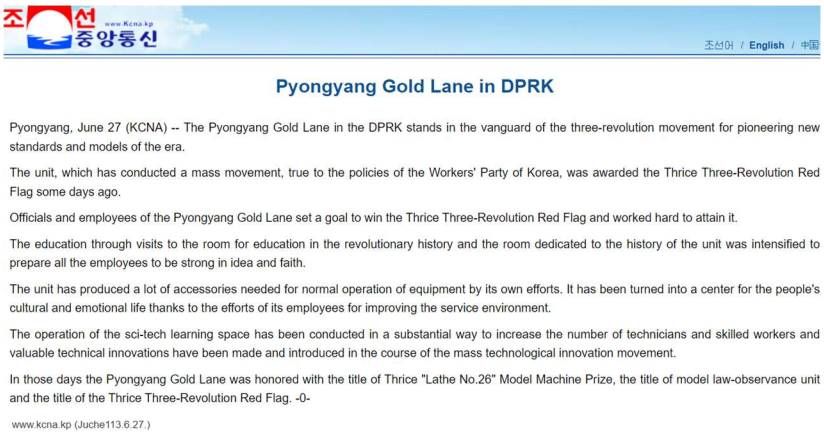

The images feature people of various ages and backgrounds actively participating in bowling, capturing moments of enjoyment and social interaction. The visuals aim to present a modern and enjoyable lifestyle in Pyongyang, emphasizing the accessibility and pleasure of recreational activities. The post is designed to humanise and personalise daily experiences in North Korea, making them relatable and appealing to a broad audience. The Instagram post focuses on personal stories and vibrant visuals, creating an emotional connection with the audience. It

[42] "북한 홍보용 인스타그램 탐방하기" Kiyogi Humor Blog https://blog.naver.com/hamsuke/223092811748. May, 2023.

uses engaging images and brief caption to convey a message of enjoyment and modernity, showcasing the positive aspects of life in Pyongyang. The emphasis on social interaction and leisure activities portrays a dynamic and accessible lifestyle, making it appealing to viewers both within and outside North Korea.

In contrast, the KCNA article titled “Pyongyang Gold Lane in DPRK” discusses the bowling alley from a formal perspective.

<Image 9> KCNA reporting on Gold Lane in Pyongyang[43]


조선 중앙통신 www.kcna.kp

조선어 / English / 中国

**Pyongyang Gold Lane in DPRK**

Pyongyang, June 27 (KCNA) -- The Pyongyang Gold Lane in the DPRK stands in the vanguard of the three-revolution movement for pioneering new standards and models of the era.

The unit, which has conducted a mass movement, true to the policies of the Workers' Party of Korea, was awarded the Thrice Three-Revolution Red Flag some days ago.

Officials and employees of the Pyongyang Gold Lane set a goal to win the Thrice Three-Revolution Red Flag and worked hard to attain it.

The education through visits to the room for education in the revolutionary history and the room dedicated to the history of the unit was intensified to prepare all the employees to be strong in idea and faith.

The unit has produced a lot of accessories needed for normal operation of equipment by its own efforts. It has been turned into a center for the people's cultural and emotional life thanks to the efforts of its employees for improving the service environment.

The operation of the sci-tech learning space has been conducted in a substantial way to increase the number of technicians and skilled workers and valuable technical innovations have been made and introduced in the course of the mass technological innovation movement.

In those days the Pyongyang Gold Lane was honored with the title of Thrice "Lathe No.26" Model Machine Prize, the title of model law-observance unit and the title of the Thrice Three-Revolution Red Flag. -0-

www.kcna.kp (Juche113.6.27.)

It highlights the achievements of Pyongyang Gold Lane in the context of the three-revolution movement for pioneering new standards and models. The article underlines the mass movement conducted by the unit, which

[43] Korea Central News Agency. http://www.kcna.kp

was warded the Thrice Three-Revolution Red Flag and highlights the efforts of officials and employees to improve the service environment and produce necessary accessories for the normal operation of equipment. It underscores the unit's role in enhancing the cultural and emotional life of the people, thanks to the dedication of its employees. The KCNA article adopts a more propagandistic tone, focusing on the achievements of the state and the role of the government in various sectors. It presents detailed descriptions of the improvements and their broader impact on public health and societal progress. The narrative aligns with the state's goals of promoting national development and projecting an image of efficiency and prosperity. By highlighting the government's efforts to provide modern sports facilities, the article aims to reinforce the image of a benevolent and forward-thinking state dedicated to the well-being of its citizens.

The key difference between these two platforms lies in their approach and tone. The Instagram post is informal and visually engaging, aiming to personalise content through personal stories and daily activities. It also uses vibrant images and brief captions to convey a message of enjoyment and modernity, an approach designed to showcase the positive aspects of life in Pyongyang and create a favourable image of the city. On the other hand, the KCNA is formal and text-heavy, focusing on promoting state achievements and the role of the government in various areas. It provides

detailed descriptions of the infrastructure improvements and their broader impact on public welfare and societal progress. The narrative is design to project an image of national development and state efficiency, aligning with the propagandistic goals of the regime. By emphasizing the sate's commitment to improving public welfare and fostering a culture of physical activity, it intends to boost the image of a caring and progressive government. The difference in medium and style reflects the distinct objectives of each platform in shaping public perception and disseminating information. While DPRK Today's Instagram posts offer a vibrant and engaging snapshot of daily life in Pyongyang, focusing on the enjoyment and accessibility of recreational activities at places such as Pyongyang Gold Lane and Munsu Water Park, KCNA articles adopt a formal and more propagandistic tone, highlighting the state's achievements in promoting physical fitness and societal progress. This case study illustrates the distinct approaches taken by the North Korean media on different platforms to shape public perception and disseminate information.

### 4.3.2 Case Study 2: Coverage of International Women's Day

International Women's Day, celebrated on 8 March, is a significant occasion recognised globally to honour the achievements of women and to promote gender equality. In the context of North Korea, the day takes

on unique characteristics as reflected in media coverage from the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA). This case study examines two distinct representations of International Women's Day KCNA: an article from 2020 and a social media post featuring greeting cards. The analysis aims to understand the narratives and symbolism employed by North Korea to celebrate this day and how these narratives serve the broader ideological goals of state.

<Image 10> DPRK Today post on International Women's Day[44]



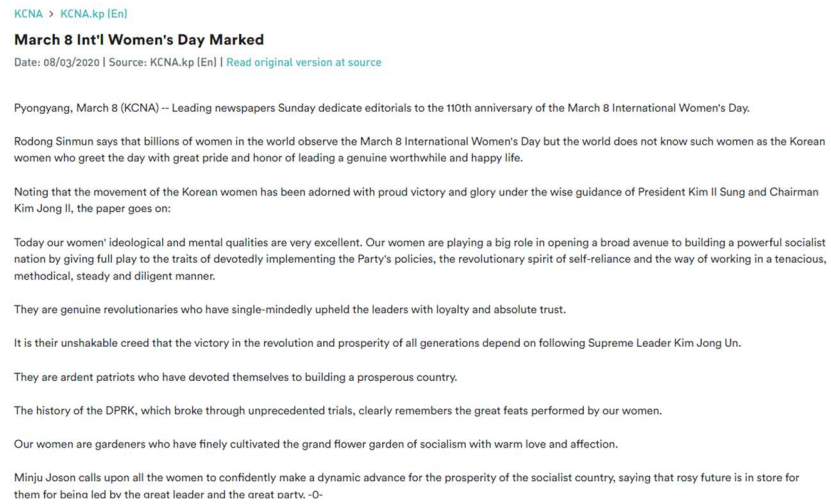

44 "북한 홍보용 인스타그램 탐방하기" Kiyogi Humor Blog https://blog.naver.com/hamsuke/223092811748. May, 2023.

The Instagram post by DPRK Today presents a visual celebration of International Women's Day. The post includes images of colourful greeting cards designed to commemorate the day. These cards are vibrant, featuring flowers, cheerful graphics, and slogans celebrating 8 March. The visual nature of the Instagram post serves a different purpose compared to the KCNA article. While KCNA focuses on ideological indoctrination, the Instagram post uses visuals to convey a sense of celebration and festivity. The greeting cards feature bright colours and imagery that appeal to a broader audience, including children and families. The use of flowers and cheerful designs aligns with global symbols of International Women's Day, making the celebration more relatable and universally recognisable. However, the underlying messages remain consistent with the state's ideological goals. The greeting cards, while seemingly simple, are embedded with slogans that reinforce the role of women in the socialist state. The cheerful imagery is juxtaposed with messages that celebrate women's contributions to socialism and their loyalty to the leadership. This subtle integration of propaganda into everyday objects such as greeting cards ensures that the state's narratives are pervasive and reach all demographics.

The KCNA article titled "March 8 Int'l Women's Day Marked," published on 8 March, 2020, provides an in-depth look at how North Korea perceives and commemorates International Women's Day. The

article emphasizes the ideological and mental qualities of North Korean women greet the day with pride and honour, attributing their sense of fulfilment to the leadership of North Korea's founder Kim Il Sung and former leader Kim Jong Il. The article begins by noting that while billions of women worldwide observe International Women's Day, the accomplishments and spirit of Korean women are unique and unparalleled.

<Image 11> KCNA coverage on International Women's Day[45]



KCNA > KCNA.kp (En)

**March 8 Int'l Women's Day Marked**

Date: 08/03/2020 | Source: KCNA.kp (En) | Read original version at source

Pyongyang, March 8 (KCNA) -- Leading newspapers Sunday dedicate editorials to the 110th anniversary of the March 8 International Women's Day.

Rodong Sinmun says that billions of women in the world observe the March 8 International Women's Day but the world does not know such women as the Korean women who greet the day with great pride and honor of leading a genuine worthwhile and happy life.

Noting that the movement of the Korean women has been adorned with proud victory and glory under the wise guidance of President Kim Il Sung and Chairman Kim Jong Il, the paper goes on:

Today our women' ideological and mental qualities are very excellent. Our women are playing a big role in opening a broad avenue to building a powerful socialist nation by giving full play to the traits of devotedly implementing the Party's policies, the revolutionary spirit of self-reliance and the way of working in a tenacious, methodical, steady and diligent manner.

They are genuine revolutionaries who have single-mindedly upheld the leaders with loyalty and absolute trust.

It is their unshakable creed that the victory in the revolution and prosperity of all generations depend on following Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un.

They are ardent patriots who have devoted themselves to building a prosperous country.

The history of the DPRK, which broke through unprecedented trials, clearly remembers the great feats performed by our women.

Our women are gardeners who have finely cultivated the grand flower garden of socialism with warm love and affection.

Minju Joson calls upon all the women to confidently make a dynamic advance for the prosperity of the socialist country, saying that rosy future is in store for them for being led by the great leader and the great party. -0-

It highlights that the movement of Korean women has been adorned with victory and glory under the wise guidance of their leaders. This narrative

[45] A screenshot of KCNA article from KCNA Watch. https://kcnawatch.org

aligns with the broader state propaganda that elevates the contributions of citizens as a reflection of the leadership's success. The text describes them as exemplary in their devotion to the Party's policies. The women are praised for their revolutionary spirit of self-reliance and diligent work ethic. The portrayal of women as genuine revolutionaries who have single-mindedly upheld the leaders with loyalty and absolute trust is central to the article. It is stated that their unshakable creed is that the victory in the revolution and the prosperity of all generations depend on following Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un. The article continues to stress that North Korean women are ardent patriots who have dedicated themselves to building a prosperous country. It recounts the history of North Korea and the significant role women have played in overcoming unprecedented trials. The narrative positions women as essential contributors to the nation's success and as embodiments of the state's ideological purity and revolutionary zeal. Furthermore, the article metaphorically describes North Korean women as gardeners who have cultivated the grand flower garden of socialism with warmth and affection. This metaphor serves to highlight the nurturing role of women in maintaining and promoting the socialist values of the state. The conclusion calls upon all women to confidently make a dynamic advance for the prosperity of the socialist country, asserting that a rosy future is in store for them under the leadership of Kim Jong Un.

The Instagram post and the KCNA article serve complementary roles in the state's propaganda machinery. The article provides a detailed, ideological narrative that aligns with the state's broader goals of promoting loyalty to the leadership and the socialist cause. It targets a more informed audience, including Party members and adults, who are expected to internalise and propagate these messages within their communities. On the other hand, the Instagram appeals to reach a wider audience, including younger generations and those who may not engage with lengthy ideological texts. The use of greeting cards as a medium ensures that the celebration of International Women's Day is accessible and festive, while still embedding the state's messages subtly. Both forms of media highlight the unique role of North Korean women as defined by the state. The comparison also reveals how North Korea leverages different media to achieve its propaganda goals. The detailed article serves to educate and indoctrinate, ensuring that the ideological narratives are clear and comprehensive. The Instagram post, with its visual appeal, ensures that these narratives are pervasive and reach a broader audience, including those less likely to engage with traditional media.

## 4.4 Comparison with Other State-led Digital Propaganda

Analysing the Instagram strategies of RT (Russia Today)[46], CGTN (China Global Television Network) [47], and DPRK Today reveals significant differences in how these state-owned media outlets utilise the platform for propaganda. RT and CGTN have more diverse content themes compared to DPRK Today, which primarily focuses on economic development, culture, technological advancement, national pride, North Korean people and anti-Western sentiments. RT's content emphasizes geopolitical narratives, breaking news, and global cooperation news, while CGTN highlights China's breaking news, economic and technological advancement, and geopolitical news. This difference in content themes reflects the varied approaches to propaganda by each state.

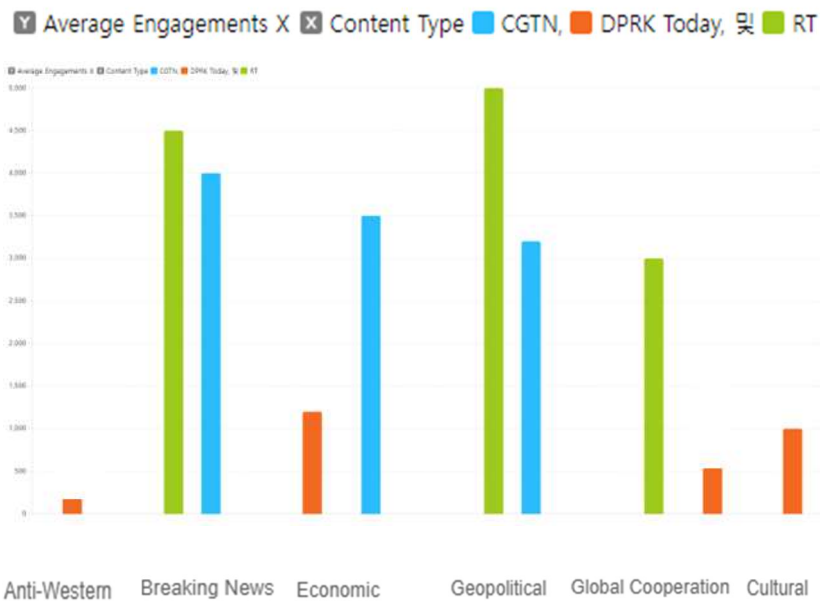
In terms of engagement tactics, RT and CGTN employ interactive and engaging methods, including the use of multimedia content, hashtags, social media campaigns, and influencer partnerships. These strategies are designed to foster higher engagement through likes, comments, and shares. RT often uses provocative and controversial posts to spark debates and discussions, whereas CGTN focuses on positive framing and soft power to build a favourable image of China. In contrast, DPRK Today has limited interaction and heavily curates its content, focusing on one-way communication to reinforce internal propaganda rather than

[46] RT Instagram Account http://www.instagram.com/rt
[47] CGTN Instagram Account https://www.instagram.com/cgtn

engaging with an international audience. The content on DPRK Today is meticulously crafted and heavily censored, with any negative feedback or dissent quickly removed to maintain a positive image.

The overall effectiveness of these strategies varies significantly. RT generates high engagement through its controversial content and real-time updates, making it effective in polarizing audiences and generating discussions around geopolitical narratives. However, this approach can lead to scepticism and credibility issues due to the perceived bias. CGTN's strategy of using soft power and cultural diplomacy helps attract a global audience and build a positive image of China. Despite the polished nature of its content, CGTN successfully engages viewers through interactive posts and collaborations with international influencers. On the other hand, DPRK Today's strategy is less effective in engaging a global audience. Its focus on regime glorification and national pride, combined with limited interaction and heavy censorship, results in lower engagement rates and modest follower growth compared to RT and CGTN.

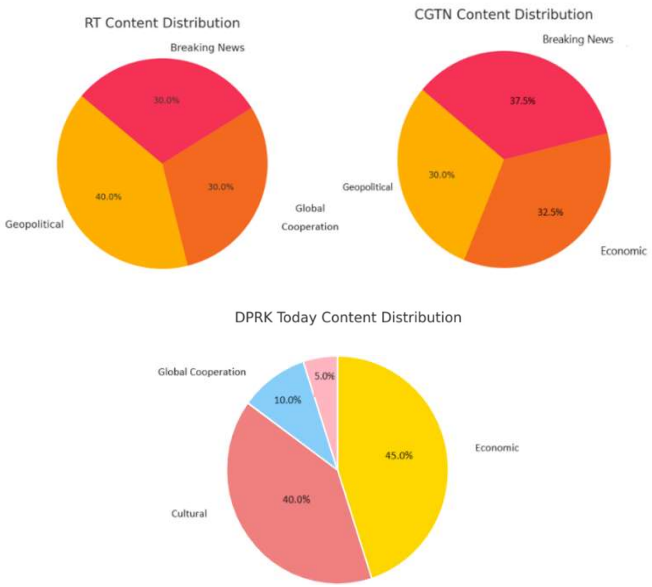
<Figure 15> Average Engagements Per Post on RT, CGTN, DPRK Today




Visual comparisons further highlight these differences. The bar Figure illustrates the average engagements per post for RT, CGTN, and DPRK Today across various content types. RT and CGTN achieve significantly higher engagement rates compared to DPRK Today. RT's geopolitical and breaking news content receive the most engagement, while CGTN's cultural and global cooperation content also attract substantial interactions. In contrast, DPRK Today's posts, particularly those focusing

on economic, cultural and anti-Western sentiments receive much lower engagement.

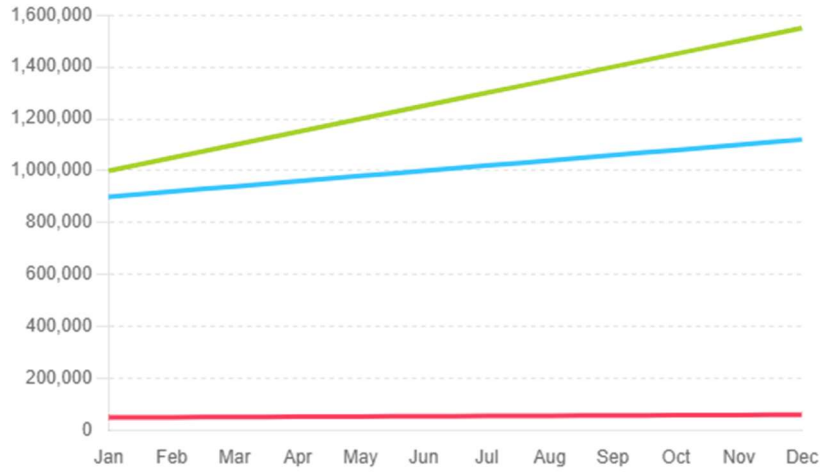
<Figure 16> Content distributions of RT, CGTN, DPRK Today on Instagram




The pie Figures provide a visual comparison of content type distribution for RT, CGTN, and DPRK Today. RT's content is divided into geopolitical (40%), breaking news (30%), and global cooperation (30%). CGTN focuses on economic (32.5%), breaking news (37.5%), and geopolitical (30%). DPRK Today's content is split among economic, cultural, 45% and 40% each. Global cooperation accounted for 10%,

while anti-western themes took mere 5%. This shows RT and CGTN's contents are more news-oriented and contain external factors and relations, whereas DPRK Today seems to maintain a strict focus on internal propaganda themes.

<Figure 17> Follower Growth Over The Past Year For RT, CGTN, DPRK Today Instagram pages




The line graph depicts the follower growth for RT, CGTN, and DPRK Today over the past year. RT shows a rapid increase in followers, starting at 1 million and reaching 1.55 million. CGTN also demonstrates steady growth, from 900,000 to 1.12 million. DPRK Today's follower growth is modest, increasing from 50,000 to 61,000, reflecting its limited appeal and engagement on the platform.

In conclusion, the Instagram strategies of RT and CGTN are more diversified and interactive, enabling them to engage with a broader audience and achieve higher follower growth and engagement rates. In contrast, DPRK Today's strategy remains focused on internal propaganda with limited global appeal and interaction. These differences highlight the varying levels of effectiveness in how states use Instagram as a propaganda tool, influencing public perception and global reach in distinct ways.

# 5. Propaganda Techniques and Strategies

## 5.1 Messaging Strategies

Propaganda, as a tool of statecraft, relies heavily on the deliberate and strategic crafting of messages to influence public perception and opinion. North Korea’s use of Instagram, particularly through the 'DPRK Today' page, provides a compelling case study in modern propaganda techniques and messaging strategies. One of the cornerstone strategies of 'DPRK Today' is the use of consistent thematic messaging. By repeatedly emphasising certain themes, the propaganda ensures that these messages become ingrained in the audience’s perception of North Korea. The primary themes include national pride, economic development, cultural heritage, and the North Korean people.

Propaganda also often seeks to elicit strong emotional responses, as emotions can override rational thought and critical analysis. 'DPRK Today' leverages this by crafting messages that evoke pride, hope, admiration, and loyalty. Emotional appeal is achieved through several techniques. Images of jubilant citizens, successful projects, and grand celebrations are designed to evoke feelings of pride and optimism. These visuals create a positive emotional response that aligns with the regime's narrative. Occasionally, posts may highlight personal stories of individuals who have benefitted from the regime's policies. These stories humanise the abstract themes of progress and leadership, making the propaganda more relatable and emotionally engaging. The use of national symbols, such as the flag, military insignia, and portraits of leaders, taps into deep-seated patriotic feelings. These symbols are powerful tools for evoking emotional responses and reinforcing national identity.

Language plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions and conveying the intended messages. 'DPRK Today' employs several linguistic strategies to enhance the effectiveness of its propaganda. The use of concise and impactful slogans that emphasise national strength, unity, and progress is prevalent. These slogans are often repeated across posts to reinforce the core messages. Incorporating quotes from Kim Jong-un and other leaders adds authority and credibility to the posts. These quotes often reflect the regime's vision and goals, aligning the leader's image with the country's

achievements. The captions and text in posts are predominantly positive, focusing on achievements, celebrations, and future prospects. This positive tone helps create an optimistic and forward-looking image of North Korea.

Visual framing is a technique used to influence how the audience perceives and interprets the visual content. 'DPRK Today' utilises visual framing to present a sanitised and idealised view of North Korea. The page carefully selects images that portray North Korea in a positive light, while omitting or downplaying negative aspects. This selective representation ensures that the audience sees only what the regime wants them to see. The composition of images often includes symbolic elements that reinforce the intended message. For example, images of Kim Jong-un might include backdrops of national symbols or successful projects to visually associate him with progress and national pride. Some images appear to be staged or contrived to convey a specific message. For instance, images of citizens showing gratitude to the leadership or workers in well-maintained factories are designed to project an image of contentment and prosperity.

Hashtags are a critical component of social media messaging, enhancing visibility and connecting posts to broader conversations. 'DPRK Today' employs a strategic use of hashtags to amplify its reach. By using popular hashtags related to North Korea, politics, and

international relations (#DPRK, #NorthKorea, #Socialism), the posts become part of larger discussions, increasing their visibility to users interested in these topics. The creation of unique, branded hashtags helps in building a recognisable identity for the propaganda. These hashtags can become associated with the regime's messages and campaigns, making it easier for users to find and follow related content. Depending on the content of the post, contextual hashtags related to specific events, achievements, or themes are used. This targeted approach ensures that the posts reach audiences interested in specific topics.

<Figure 18> Top 20 Hashtags and Their Counts

| Rank | Hashtags | Count |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | #Pyongyang | 849 |
| 2 | #Songun | 847 |
| 3 | #Vovcyan | 785 |
| 4 | #dprktoday | 429 |
| 5 | #최근공화국의소식 (Latest news of the Republic) | 396 |
| 6 | #dprk | 252 |
| 7 | #koreanews | 182 |
| 8 | #조선의오늘 (DPRK Today) | 180 |
| 9 | #NewHouses | 176 |
| 10 | #새집들이 (Moving into new houses) | 176 |
| 11 | #문화주택들 (Culture houses) | 162 |
| 12 | #예술공연 (Cultural performances) | 157 |
| 13 | #ruralconstruction | 156 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 14 | #농촌특유의아담한살림집들 (Small housings in rural areas) | 151 |
| 15 | # beautytothevillage | 149 |
| 16 | #villagebeauty | 149 |
| 17 | #MovingintoNewHousesHeldinDPRK | 147 |
| 18 | #사회주의농촌건설 (Socialist rural construction) | 147 |
| 19 | #socialistruralconstruction | 144 |
| 20 | #countrysidespeculiar-dwellinghouse | 144 |

The table displays the top 20 hashtags used on the DPRK Today Instagram page, along with their respective counts. They are ranked by frequency, indicating how often each hashtag has been used in the posts.

The most frequently used hashtags, #Pyongyang and #Songun, highlight the focus on North Korea's capital and military-first policy (Songun). Pyongyang is often showcased as a symbol of progress and modernity, reflecting the regime's emphasis on portraying a thriving capital city. The Songun policy underscores the importance of the military in North Korean society, reinforcing the regime's narrative of strength and resilience. Hashtags such as #dprktoday and #dprk serve to brand the content as distinctly North Korean. These tags help categorise posts related to the country, making them easily discoverable to users interested in North Korean topics. This strategy aims to enhance the visibility of North Korea's social media presence and ensure consistent branding. Multiple hashtags such as #NewHouses, #새집들이,

#MoingintoNewHouseHeldinDPRK focus on new housing and construction. These emphasise the regime's efforts to showcase economic development and improvement in living standards. Highlighting new housing projects aims to project an image of progress and modernisation, countering international narrative of economic hardship. Hashtags like #문화주택들 (Cultural Houses) and #예술공연 (Art Performance) stress North Korea's cultural heritage and artistic endeavours. These posts serve to humanise the North Korean people, showcasing their rich cultural identity and promoting national pride. The inclusion of hashtags focused on rural areas, such as #ruralconstruction, #beautytothevillage, #villagebeauty reflects the regime's narrative of comprehensive national development. By emphasizing rural construction and beautification, the propaganda aims to present a balanced view of development that includes both urban and rural areas. Hashtags such as #최근공화국의소식 (Recent news of Republic) and #KoreaNews indicate a focus on providing updates and news. These tags help keep followers informed about the latest developments in North Korea, maintaining engagement and interest. Hashtags #사회주의농촌건설 (socialist rural construction) and #socialistruralconstruction underscore the ideological foundation of North Korean propaganda. Promoting socialist construction projects aligns with the regime's ideological goals and reinforces its commitment

to socialist principles. This strategic use of hashtags helps ensure that North Korea's messages reach a wide audience and resonate with followers, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of its digital propaganda. Engaging with the audience is crucial for maintaining interest and fostering a sense of community. 'DPRK Today' employs several strategies to enhance interactivity and engagement. However, North Korea fails to utilise Instagram's interactive features, such as Stories, polls, replies to comments, reels and live videos, which are all designed to help keep the content dynamic and engaging. These features encourage real-time interaction and feedback from the audience, as well as to create user-generated contents. North Korea's posting has still been rather systematic than engaging. The messaging strategies employed by 'DPRK Today' on Instagram highlight the approach North Korea takes in its digital propaganda efforts. Through consistent thematic messaging, emotional appeal, strategic use of language, visual framing, and hashtag strategy, the regime effectively leverages Instagram's platform to shape perceptions and influence public opinion. However, it still eludes its stiff style of communication that can be seen in its traditional media, which shows that there still is a room to improve.

## 5.2 Use of Symbolism and Iconography

The effective use of symbolism and iconography is a cornerstone of North Korea's propaganda strategy, particularly on platforms like

Instagram. Through the 'DPRK Today' page, the regime employs various symbols and iconic images to communicate powerful messages and reinforce its narratives. Symbols are potent tools in propaganda, because they can convey complex ideas and emotions succinctly and powerfully. They evoke associations and connotations that can reinforce ideological messages without the need for explicit explanations. National symbols like the flag and emblems of the ruling party are prominently displayed to evoke patriotism and a sense of belonging. Military symbols, such as soldiers, weaponry, and military parades, are used to project power and resilience. Traditional cultural symbols are employed to highlight North Korea's unique heritage and historical continuity. The North Korean flag, featuring a red star, red stripe, and blue borders, is a ubiquitous symbol in the 'DPRK Today' posts. The flag represents the state, the ruling party, and the socialist ideology of the country. It is often displayed in images of public gatherings, official buildings, and national celebrations. Images of mass parades, rallies, and celebrations prominently feature the national flag, reinforcing national pride and unity. The flag appears in the background in photos of state meetings, symbolising state authority and continuity. The emblem of the Workers' Party of Korea, featuring a hammer, sickle, and brush, symbolises the unity of workers, farmers, and intellectuals under the party's leadership. It underscores the ideological foundation of the state and the regime's commitment to socialism. The

emblem is often displayed in posts related to official party communications, announcements, and achievements. Images of new buildings, monuments, and public spaces frequently incorporate the party emblem, linking progress and development to the party's leadership. Military imagery, including soldiers, tanks, missiles, and military parades, although significantly less seen on the DPRK Today Instagram page, compared to traditional media, is used to project strength and deterrence. These symbols are meant to showcase North Korea's military capabilities and resolve. Photos of military parades and exercises highlight the discipline, scale, and power of the North Korean military. Traditional cultural elements, such as traditional attire, folk dances, and historical sites, are used to emphasise North Korea's cultural heritage and historical continuity. These iconographies aim to foster a sense of pride in the nation's unique identity. The strategic placement of symbols within images is a crucial aspect of visual framing, which influences how viewers interpret and respond to the content. 'DPRK Today' employs visual framing techniques to enhance the impact of its symbols. Important symbols, such as the national flag are often placed prominently in the foreground of images to ensure they are immediately noticed and emphasised. Leaders are often photographed with symbolic backdrops, such as national monuments or significant infrastructure projects, to create a visual association between the leader and national achievements.

Symbols are used contextually to reinforce specific messages. For instance, military symbols are used in posts about defence and security, while cultural symbols are used in posts celebrating national heritage. They are powerful because they evoke emotional and psychological responses. The use of symbolism and iconography on the 'DPRK Today' Instagram page is a sophisticated strategy that enhances the regime's propaganda efforts. By carefully selecting and framing symbols, North Korea effectively communicates powerful messages that reinforce national pride, legitimise leadership, showcase strength, and promote cultural identity. Understanding these techniques provides deeper insights into the mechanisms of modern propaganda and the role of visual communication in shaping perceptions and influencing public opinion. As digital media continues to evolve, the strategic use of symbols and icons will remain a critical component of effective propaganda.

## 5.3 Narrative Construction

Narrative construction weaves individual messages into a coherent story that reinforces the desired perception of a regime. 'DPRK Today' Instagram page constructs narratives around the key themes with techniques such as repetition, storytelling, framing, and symbolic representation. It enhances the coherence and impact of these narratives. Consistent thematic messaging ensures key elements become ingrained in the audience's perception. Storytelling humanises the regime's

achievements and policies, making the narrative more relatable and emotionally engaging. Positive framing and selective presentation of information maintain a favourable image of North Korea. The constructed narratives influence how viewers perceive North Korea, reinforcing ideological foundations, creating emotional connections, and counteracting negative international narratives. The strategic construction of narratives on the DPRK Today Instagram page impacts the audience in several ways. First, it shapes perceptions. By presenting a consistent and positive narrative, 'DPRK Today' influences how viewers perceive North Korea. The narrative then reinforces the ideological foundations of the regime, promoting socialism, self-reliance, and loyalty to the leadership. This ideological reinforcement is critical for maintaining internal cohesion and external legitimacy. Third, the narratives, through storytelling and emotional appeal, create a connection with the audience, which makes the propaganda more persuasive and memorable. Lastly, the positive framing and selective presentation of information help counteract negative international narratives about North Korea. By showcasing progress and its cultural pride stemming from the people, the propaganda seeks to challenge and change external perceptions. The narrative construction on the 'DPRK Today' Instagram page is a sophisticated and strategic effort to shape perceptions and promote the regime’s image. Through techniques such as repetition, storytelling, framing, and strategic

media use, 'DPRK Today' weaves individual messages into a cohesive and compelling narrative. Understanding these techniques provides valuable insights into the mechanisms of modern propaganda and the role of narrative in influencing public opinion. As digital platforms continue to evolve, the construction and dissemination of narratives will remain a critical component of effective propaganda strategies.

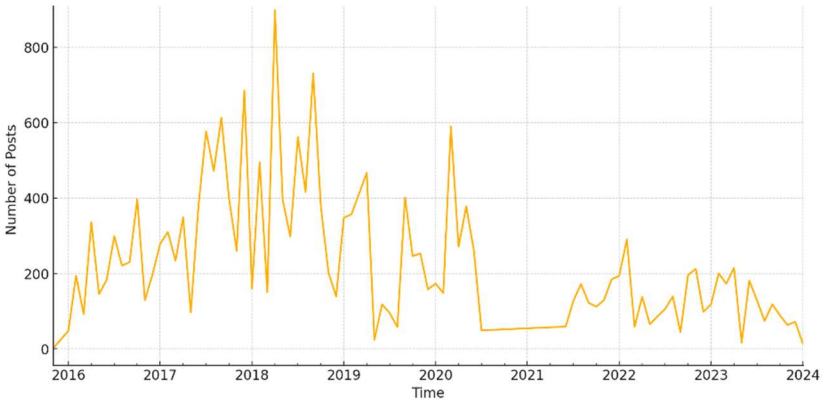
# 6. Audience Engagement and Impact

## 6.1 Frequency of Posts Analysis

The frequency of posts on the 'DPRK Today' Instagram page is a critical indicator of the strategic priorities and adaptive tactics employed by North Korea in its digital propaganda efforts. By analysing the number of posts over time, it is possible to gain insights into how the regime uses Instagram to engage with audiences, respond to external events, and shape its digital narrative. This chapter provides a comprehensive analysis of the frequency of posts, detailing the methodology, key findings, and implications for audience engagement and propaganda effectiveness. The dataset includes timestamps for each post made on the 'DPRK Today' Instagram page from November 2015 to January 2024. This data allows us to perform a detailed time series analysis. The first step involves preparing the data by cleaning it to handle any missing or incorrect timestamps and converting these timestamps into a format suitable for

time series analysis. This ensures that the analysis is based on accurate and reliable data. Once the data is prepared, the number of posts per month can be calculated to create a monthly posting frequency. This approach enables us to visualise trends and identify patterns over the study period. By using tools such as pandas and matplotlib in Python, time series graphs that illustrate the number of posts each month can be generated. These visualisations are essential for highlighting periods of increased or decreased activity and for correlating these trends with significant political events, holidays, or changes in propaganda strategy.

<Figure 19> Frequency of Posts on DPRK Today Instagram Page




The time series graph reveals the posting frequency on a monthly basis. This visualisation can highlight periods of increased or decreased activity, which may correlate with significant political events, holidays, or changes

in propaganda strategy. The analysis of posting frequency shows several key patterns. During the early years of the 'DPRK Today' Instagram page, from November 2015 to the end of 2017, there is a gradual increase in posting frequency. This period likely represents the regime's efforts to establish a presence on Instagram and build an initial following. The steady rise in the number of posts suggests a deliberate strategy to grow the page's audience and experiment with different types of content. By testing various messaging strategies and visual formats, the regime could gauge audience response and refine its approach to maximise engagement. From January 2018 to December 2020, a noticeable spike in posting frequency becomes apparent. This increase is likely driven by heightened political activity and significant national events that the regime sought to promote internationally. For example, the 2018 inter-Korean summit and subsequent meetings between Kim Jong-un and other world leaders provided opportunities for North Korea to enhance its visibility on the global stage. During this period, the 'DPRK Today' page frequently posted content related to these diplomatic engagements, showcasing images and videos that highlighted the country's leadership and progress. The intensification phase is characterised by focused campaigns aimed at capitalising on international attention. The regime's increased activity during these peak periods reflects a strategic effort to shape global perceptions and reinforce its narratives of strength, unity, and progress.

By ramping up the frequency of posts, North Korea could ensure that its messages reached a broader audience, leveraging Instagram's algorithm to maximise the visibility and impact of its content. The later years, from January 2021 to December 2023, show more fluctuations in posting frequency, with periods of both high and low activity. These fluctuations suggest a more adaptive and reactive approach to digital propaganda, as the regime responds to shifting strategic priorities, resource constraints, and external pressures. For instance, periods of heightened international scrutiny or sanctions might prompt the regime to adjust its propaganda tactics, either by intensifying its efforts to counteract negative perceptions or by reducing activity to avoid further provocation. During this phase, the 'DPRK Today' page demonstrates its ability to adapt its posting frequency in response to changing circumstances. This adaptive strategy indicates a sophisticated understanding of social media dynamics and audience engagement, allowing the regime to maintain its influence and visibility despite external challenges. By analysing the types of content posted during these fluctuating periods, insights into how the regime prioritises different themes and messages can be gained to align with its evolving objectives. The dataset reveals a sharp decline in posting frequency starting in January 2024, corresponding with North Korea's decision to shut down its social media channels. This cessation marks a significant shift in the regime's digital propaganda strategy. The abrupt

halt in activity could be a response to escalating tensions, increased scrutiny from international bodies, or a strategic pivot to other forms of communication. The decision to withdraw from Instagram indicates a reassessment of the platform's utility and effectiveness in achieving the regime's propaganda goals. The sharp decline in posts has implications for audience engagement and retention. A consistent posting schedule is crucial for maintaining audience interest and loyalty. When the frequency of posts drops suddenly, it can lead to a decline in engagement and a loss of followers. For the 'DPRK Today' page, the cessation of activity likely resulted in decreased visibility and interaction, impacting the regime's ability to influence public perception through this platform. Analysing the frequency of posts provides valuable insights into the broader strategies and objectives of North Korea's digital propaganda efforts. The patterns identified in this analysis reflect the regime's adaptive and strategic use of Instagram to engage with audiences, respond to external events, and shape its narrative. The initial growth phase highlights the importance of establishing a strong presence and building an audience base, while the intensification phase underscores the significance of leveraging key events to maximise impact. The fluctuations and strategic shifts in the later years demonstrate the regime's ability to adapt its tactics in response to changing circumstances, ensuring continued relevance and influence. The analysis of posting frequency also offers insights into the

effectiveness of different types of content in engaging the audience. By examining the posts that received the highest engagement during peak periods, the themes and messages that resonate most with viewers can be identified. For instance, content related to national pride, economic achievements, and leadership tends to attract significant attention, suggesting that these themes are particularly effective in capturing the audience's interest. The strategic withdrawal from Instagram in January 2024 highlights the challenges and limitations of relying on social media for propaganda. While platforms like Instagram offer powerful tools for reaching and influencing audiences, they are also subject to external regulations, platform policies, and geopolitical dynamics. The decision to cease activity on Instagram reflects a broader trend of authoritarian regimes reassessing their digital strategies in response to evolving risks and opportunities.

Overall, the frequency of posts analysis on the 'DPRK Today' Instagram page provides a comprehensive understanding of how North Korea uses social media for propaganda. Examining the patterns and trends in posting activity offers insights into the regime's strategic priorities, adaptive tactics, and the impact on audience engagement. This analysis underscores the importance of consistent and strategic use of social media to maintain visibility and influence, while also highlighting the challenges and limitations that come with digital propaganda in an

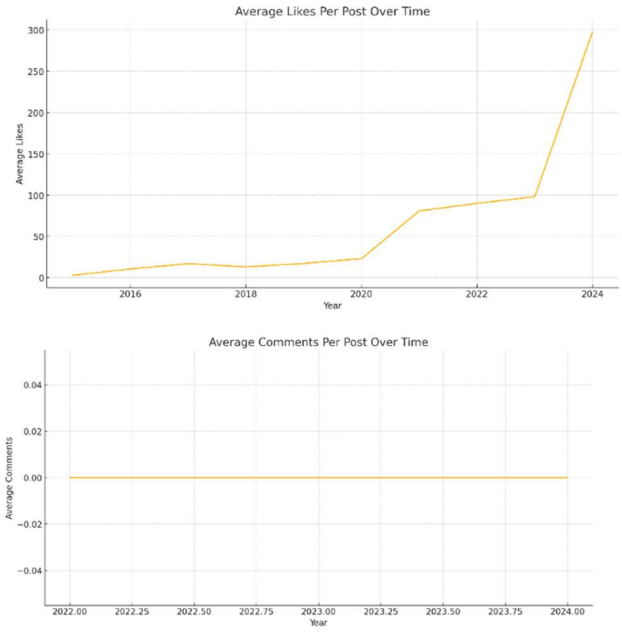
increasingly complex and interconnected world. As digital platforms continue to evolve, the strategies and tactics of state-sponsored propaganda will likely adapt, making ongoing analysis essential for understanding the dynamics of modern propaganda and its implications for global information warfare.

## 6.2 Engagement Metrics Analysis

Engagement metrics, such as the number of likes and comments per post, are critical for understanding how users interact with content on the 'DPRK Today' Instagram page. These metrics offer valuable insights into the effectiveness of North Korea's digital propaganda efforts and the degree to which the content resonates with its audience. By analysing changes in user engagement over time, the impact of the propaganda strategies employed can be assessed and periods of high or low engagement can be identified. To conduct this analysis, the average number of likes and comments per post for each year was calculated. This data was then visualised to identify trends and shifts in engagement over time. The resulting engagement metrics graphs reveal trends in user interaction with the posts, allowing us to evaluate the effectiveness of North Korea's digital propaganda and identify key periods of activity and audience response. The analysis of engagement metrics highlights several key trends: initial growth (2015-2017), peak engagement (2018-2020), decline and fluctuations (2021-2023), and minimal engagement (2024).

These trends provide a comprehensive view of how user engagement with the 'DPRK Today' Instagram page has evolved over time. During the early years of the 'DPRK Today' Instagram page, from November 2015 to December 2017, there is a gradual increase in both likes and comments per post. This trend indicates growing user interest and interaction as the page gained visibility. The steady rise in engagement metrics during this period suggests that the content was effectively capturing the attention of the audience and fostering initial engagement.

<Figure 20> Average Likes and Comments Per Post Over Time (2015-2024)



The engagement metrics graphs reveal trends in user interaction with the posts. By examining these trends, the effectiveness of North Korea's digital propaganda can be assessed and periods of high or low engagement can be identified. The early years show a gradual increase in both likes and comments per post, indicating growing user interest and interaction as the page gained visibility. The period from January 2018 to December 2020 marks a significant increase in engagement, with both likes and comments reaching their highest levels. This peak in engagement corresponds with a period of increased posting activity and suggests that the content during these years was particularly effective in engaging the audience. Several factors may have contributed to this spike, including heightened political activity, significant national events, and targeted campaigns designed to capitalise on international attention. In the later years, from January 2021 to December 2023, engagement metrics show a decline with more fluctuations in both likes and comments. This decline may reflect changes in content strategy, audience fatigue, or external factors affecting user interest. The fluctuations suggest that while some content continued to resonate with the audience, there were challenges in maintaining consistent engagement. This period of variability indicates a potential need for the regime to reassess its content strategies and adapt to changing audience preferences. The engagement metrics drop sharply in 2024, reflecting the cessation of activity on the

'DPRK Today' page. This decline underscores the impact of the regime's decision to shut down its social media channels. With minimal or no new content being posted, user engagement naturally plummets, indicating that ongoing activity is crucial for maintaining audience interest and interaction. Analysing the engagement metrics across these distinct periods provides a comprehensive view of how user interaction with the 'DPRK Today' Instagram page has evolved. The initial growth phase indicates successful early efforts to capture audience interest, while the peak engagement phase highlights the effectiveness of targeted content strategies during significant political events. The subsequent decline and fluctuations point to challenges in sustaining engagement, possibly due to content strategy shifts or external factors affecting audience behaviour. The sharp drop in engagement in 2024 reflects the critical role of continuous content creation and the impact of strategic decisions on audience retention. The overall trends emphasise the importance of adapting content strategies to maintain relevance and engagement, particularly in the dynamic environment of social media. The analysis of engagement metrics offers valuable insights into the effectiveness of North Korea's digital propaganda on Instagram. High engagement periods indicate successful content strategies that resonate with the audience, while periods of decline suggest areas for improvement. By understanding these trends, the regime can refine its approach to digital

propaganda, focusing on content that drives higher engagement and effectively communicates its messages. Additionally, the engagement metrics highlight the importance of consistency and adaptation in social media strategies. The ability to respond to changing audience preferences and external conditions is crucial for maintaining influence and visibility in the digital space. The 'DPRK Today' Instagram page serves as a case study in how state-sponsored propaganda can leverage engagement metrics to optimise its impact and reach.

The analysis of engagement metrics on the 'DPRK Today' Instagram page provides a detailed understanding of how North Korea uses social media to engage with audiences and disseminate its propaganda. Examining likes and comments over time can identify key trends and assess the effectiveness of the content strategies employed. The insights gained from this analysis underscore the importance of adaptive and consistent social media practices in maintaining audience engagement and maximising the impact of digital propaganda efforts. As social media continues to evolve, ongoing analysis of engagement metrics will be essential for understanding and enhancing the effectiveness of state-sponsored digital propaganda.

# 7. Conclusion

## 7.1 Key Findings

The study reveals several significant trends and insights regarding the 'DPRK Today' Instagram page. The initial growth phase from 2016 to 2017 showed a gradual increase in posting frequency and engagement, indicating successful efforts to capture audience interest. The peak engagement period from 2018 to 2020 corresponded with significant national and international events, demonstrating the effectiveness of targeted content strategies during these times. However, from 2021 to 2023, there was a noticeable decline in engagement, suggesting challenges in maintaining audience interest and the critical need for consistent content creation. Thematic analysis identified key themes such as cultural heritage, economic development, national pride, and international relations. The predominant focus on cultural heritage and economic progress underscores North Korea's strategic intent to project an image of a culturally rich and advancing nation. Notably, the frequent omission of leadership portrayals, particularly of Kim Jong-un, in favour of highlighting national achievements indicates a deliberate strategy to dilute the totalitarian image traditionally associated with the regime. Sentiment analysis revealed that positive sentiment peaked during periods of significant political events, aligning with high engagement levels. The use of emotionally resonant and positive imagery effectively enhanced the propaganda's appeal during these high-sentiment periods. However, as engagement waned, there was a corresponding decline in positive

sentiment. Comparative analysis with other state actors like Russia and China through its RT and CGTN Instagram pages highlighted that the 'DPRK Today' Instagram page experienced lower engagement and follower growth. This suggests North Korea's more insular focus and limited global appeal, despite employing similar digital propaganda strategies.

## 7.2 Implications for Understanding North Korean Propaganda

The findings suggest that North Korea has strategically adapted to global digital trends by leveraging platforms like Instagram. The visually appealing content aims to bypass language barriers and reach international audiences, marking a significant evolution in the regime's propaganda tactics. High-quality visuals and positive emotional content demonstrate an understanding of the power of visual communication in modern propaganda, creating a more attractive and relatable image of North Korea to counter negative international perceptions. The study highlights the challenges of maintaining audience interest in a dynamic digital environment, as evidenced by the decline in engagement and sentiment over time. This underscores the need for continuous content innovation and adaptation to audience preferences. Furthermore, the comparative analysis indicates that North Korea's digital propaganda

strategies may require refinement to achieve broader international reach and impact.

## 7.3 Future Research

Future research should explore several areas to build on these findings. Expanding the analysis to include other social media platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook would offer a more comprehensive understanding of North Korea's digital propaganda strategies. Given the restriction on accessing visual content post-2024, future studies should incorporate methodologies to analyse the visual aspects of propaganda, which are crucial for understanding its full impact.

Analysing the nature of comments and interactions on posts can provide deeper insights into how audiences perceive and engage with the propaganda content. This qualitative analysis could reveal more about the effectiveness and reception of North Korean propaganda. Including more state actors in comparative analysis could help identify common strategies and unique approaches in state-sponsored digital propaganda, enhancing the understanding of global propaganda tactics and informing counter-propaganda measures.

Conducting longitudinal studies to track changes in propaganda strategies over extended periods would provide insights into how these strategies evolve in response to internal and external factors. By addressing these areas, future research can further illuminate the

complexities of digital propaganda and contribute to more effective strategies for monitoring and countering state-sponsored influence campaigns.

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국문요약

# 북한의 뉴미디어 선전전략에 관한 연구: '조선의 오늘'인스타그램 채널을 중심으로

**정치통일 전공 김정윤**

**지도교수 김정**

본 논문은 2016 년부터 김정은 정권 하에 운영되어 왔던 북한 국영 매체인 조선의 오늘 (DPRK Today)의 인스타그램 채널을 중심으로, 북한의 뉴미디어 채널 수용 및 적극적인 활용을 통한 선전선동의 전략적 진화를 탐구한다. 북한은 김정은 시대에 들어 전반적으로 선전선동 시스템을 확대하는 일환으로 인스타그램을 운영해왔다. 대내적으로는 인민들을 사상으로 무장시키고, 대외적으로는 스스로를 고립시켜

은둔해온 북한이 최근 국제적으로 직면하고 있는 엄격한 제재에도 불구하고 이 같이 적극적으로 대외 프로파간다의 영역을 넓혀간 것은 기존의 제한적이던 신문과 방송의 단순 외국어 번역에서 벗어나 북한의 프로파간다를 현대화하고 더욱더 폭넓은 국제 청중을 목표로 함으로써, 북한에 대한 국제 언론의 부정적인 이미지에 맞대응한 것으로 보인다. 이 연구는 인스타그램에 초점을 두고 있으나, 북한의 전통적인 미디어 프로파간다 패러다임이 유튜브, 트위터, 페이스북, 팟캐스트 등을 포함한 현대 디지털 플랫폼으로 확장했다는 점을 중요도 높게 평가했다. 이 전환점은 단순히 기술적인 것이 아니라 글로벌 디지털화와 변화하는 지정학적 환경에 직면한 전략적 재조정을 의미한다.

본 연구의 핵심 목표는 북한의 한 뉴미디어 채널인 '조선의 오늘' 인스타그램을 통해 북한의 디지털 선전 전략의 다각적인 측면을 밝히는 것이다. 북한의 디지털 프로파간다와 기존 언론의 선전 전술, 대상 청중 및 메시지의 차이를 조명하고, 다른 국가주도의 디지털 프로파간다와 비교하여 북한 고유의 디지털 선전 전략을 분석하고자 한다. 이를 위하여 양적 연구인 텍스트 마이닝과 토픽 모델링, 질적 연구인 감정분석, 그리고 전통 미디어 콘텐츠와 비교 분석한 내용을 결합한

방법론적 접근 방식을 통해 이 연구는 북한이 뉴미디어에서 대외적으로 선전하고자 하는 전략적 메시지와 진화양상에 대한 탐구를 제공한다.

이번 연구 결과는 북한의 프로파간다 묘사에서 눈에 띄는 이분법이 있음을 밝혀냈다. 북한의 뉴미디어 프로파간다는 기존의 전통적인 신문, 방송, 통신사에서 보여지는 선전선동과 달리, 수령님 찬양에 대한 내용을 철저히 배제함으로써 독재정권과 관련된 은둔적이고 권위주의적인 내러티브와 극명한 대조를 이루며, 북한 주민들의 번영된 삶과 경제적 발전, 기술 발전 등을 강조함으로써 북한이 지극히 정상국가라는 이미지를 투영하는 것을 주 목적으로 하는 것으로 보인다. 이는 또한, 미국의 제재가 북한에 미치는 영향이 없으며, 서구 및 국제 언론에서 묘사하는 북한에 대한 부정적인 이미지를 정면으로 반박하는 역할을 하는데 일조하고자 했다.

이러한 뉴미디어에서의 활동은 북한의 글로벌 이미지를 재구성하기 위한 계산된 전략을 강조할뿐만 아니라, 현대 지정학적 영역에서 디지털 미디어의 힘에 대한 이해를 반영한다. 인스타그램에서의 짧은 포스팅 주기 및 상호작용 허용, 해시태그와 같은 기능을 통해 북한은 지난 8 년간

현대화된 북한의 이미지를 투영하고, 북한을 자발적으로 접하지 않을 수 있는 세대의 국제 청중에게까지 적극적으로 북한의 내러티브를 선전할 수 있는 기회를 적극적으로 활용했다.

이와 같은 연구와 연구결과를 통해 본 논문은 디지털 시대에 북한의 복잡한 선전 활동을 살펴볼 수 있었다. 이 작업이 북한의 디지털 선전에 대한 학문적 담론에 기여할뿐만 아니라, 국제사회가 북한의 대외 커뮤니케이션 및 프로파간다 전략 진화 역학을 이해하고 대응하는 데 있어 실용적인 통찰력을 제공할 수 있기를 바란다.

주제어: 북한학, 북한 연구, 북한 언론 연구, 북한 선전 기술, 북한 프로파간다, 북한 인스타그램, 북한 SNS, 북한 디지털 선전선동, 북한 뉴미디어 전략, 북한 인스타그램 분석, 김정은 정권 선전선동, 국제 제재, SNS 선전, 정치 커뮤니케이션, 정보 전쟁, 커뮤니케이션 전략, 인터넷 검열, 공공 외교, 전략적 메시징, 국가주도 온라인 캠페인