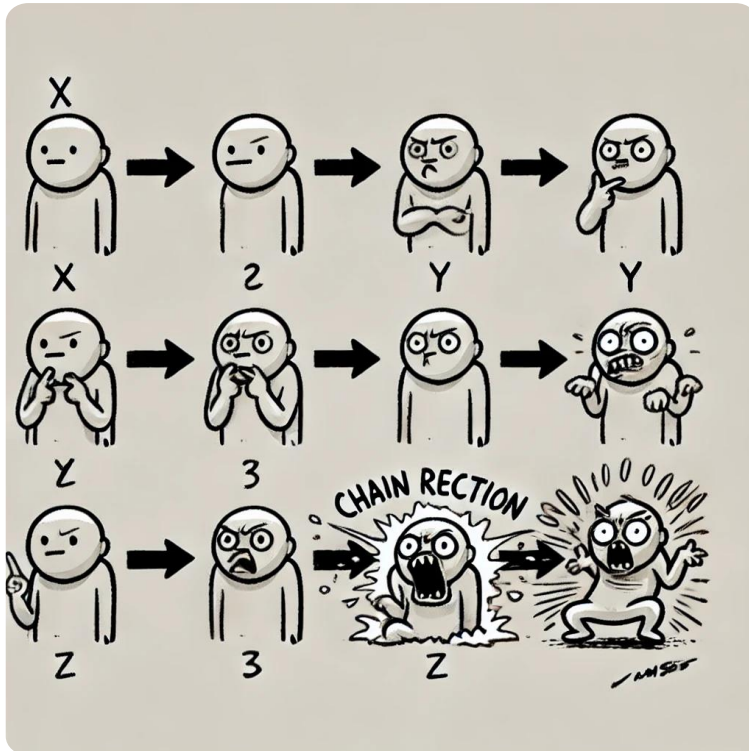


WHERE THERE IS NO THEORY OF DISINFORMATION

Three Maxims to Guide
Counternarrative Strategies and
Resilience-Building

Why Theories?



Theories provide a format for looking at, organizing, explaining, and predicting phenomena.

We need a theory to inform counternarrative strategies.



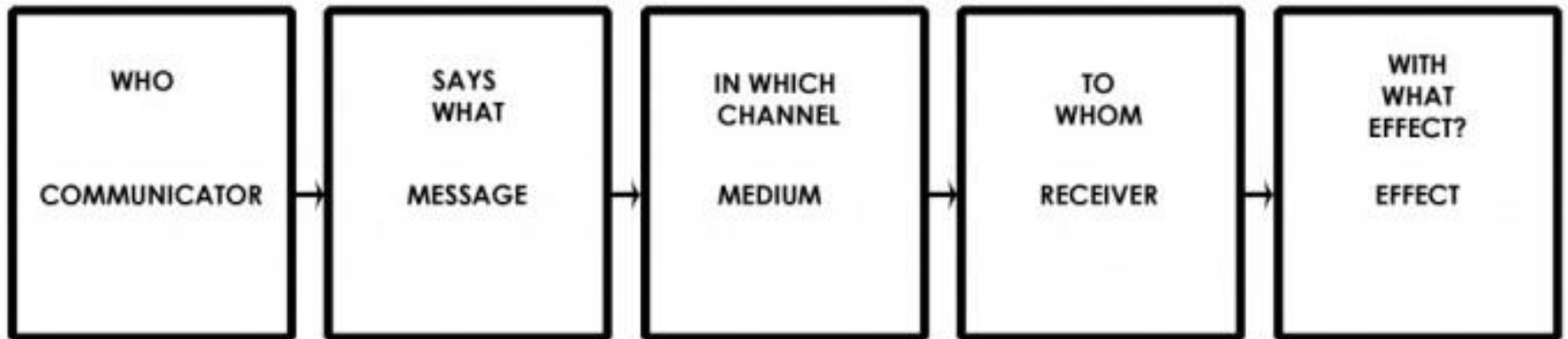
Harold D. Lasswell

Image Credit: University of Chicago archives

“The war of ideas on ideas”

Counternarratives have their roots in Harold Lasswell's Hypodermic Needle Theory.

Lasswell's Classic Model of Communication



“Who says what, to whom, in what channel, with what effect?”

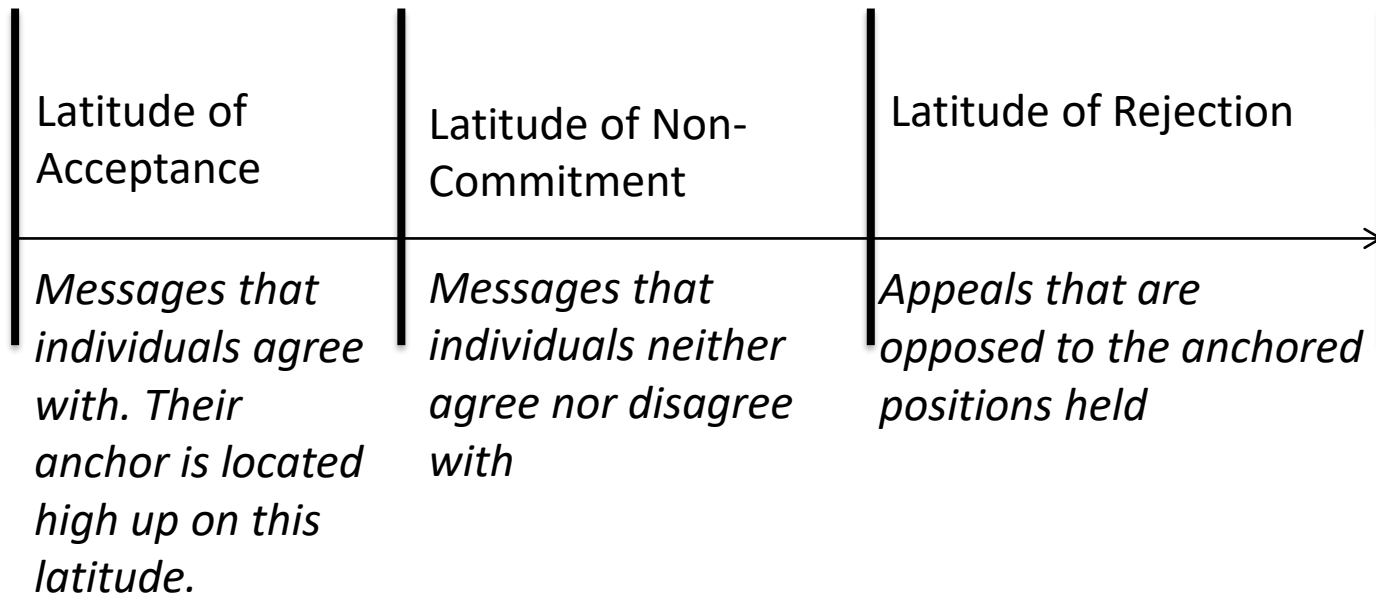
Challenges with Traditional Approaches

- Traditional communication models often emphasize linear, deterministic impacts, treating audiences as isolated entities. This ignores the context, interconnectedness, and cultural nuances that shape meaning-making within social groups.

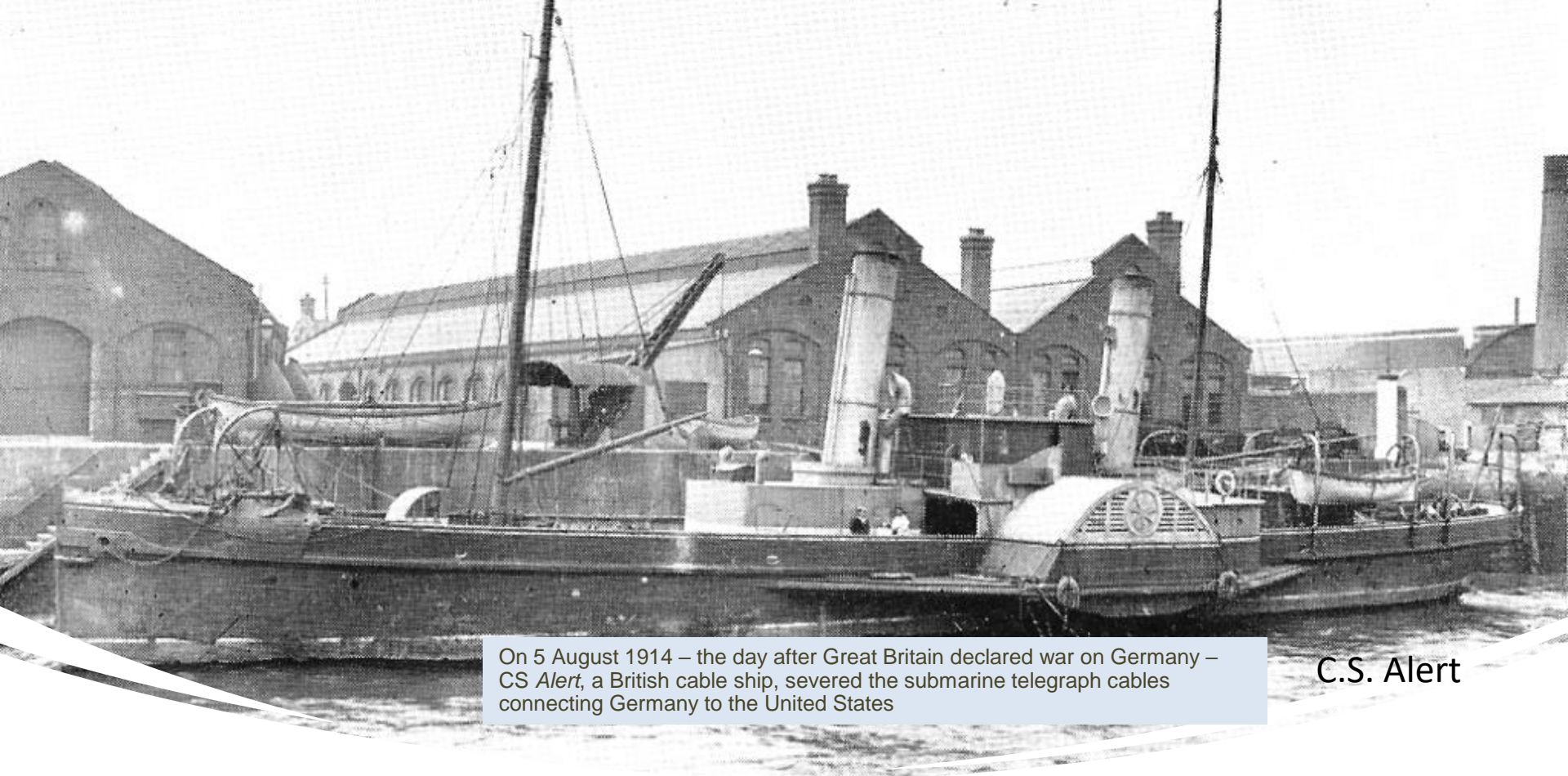
The Three Maxims: A Guide for Effective Campaigns

1. The Vaguer the Message, the Better.
2. Messaging is Nothing; Cognitive Access is Everything.
3. Useful Information is the Meta-Message.

Maxim 1: The Vaguer the Message, the Better



Sherif and Hovland's Latitudes of Attitude: Instead of changing attitudes, messages that fall into a target audience's latitude of rejection can boomerang, ending up eliciting the direct opposite of its intended purpose



On 5 August 1914 – the day after Great Britain declared war on Germany – *CS Alert*, a British cable ship, severed the submarine telegraph cables connecting Germany to the United States

C.S. Alert

Maxim 2:
Messaging is
Nothing; Cognitive
Access is Everything

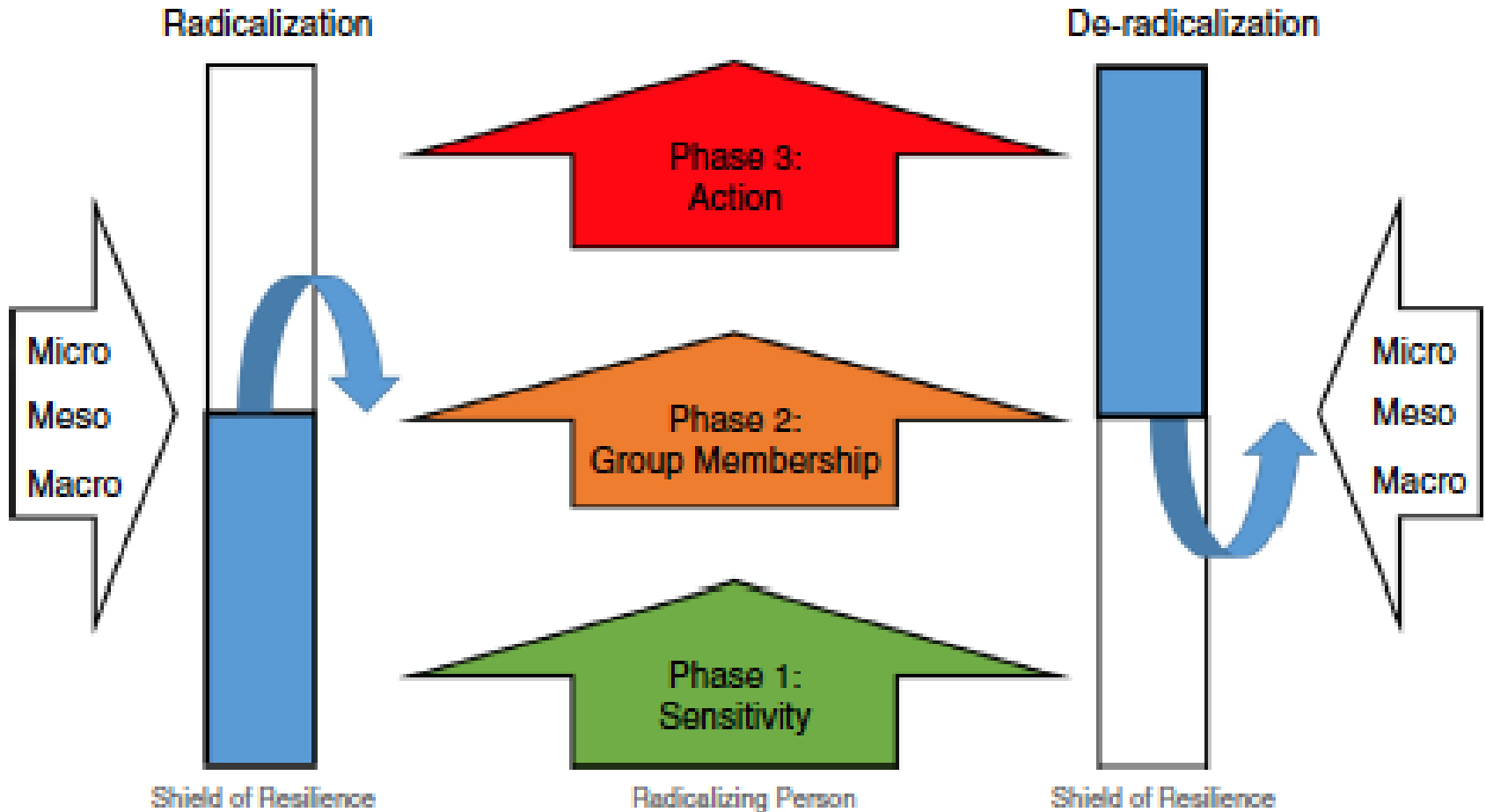
- Cognitive access determines how messages are received. Significant symbols, such as flags and slogans, can prime audiences for the intended message. British control over information during WWI is an example of priming audiences for empathy before messaging.

Maxim 3: Useful Information as the Meta-Message

- Useful information builds trust with the audience, making them more receptive. During the Iraq War, Radio Tikrit provided practical information, gaining trust before shifting to influence messaging. Audiences engage with sources that fulfill their informational needs.



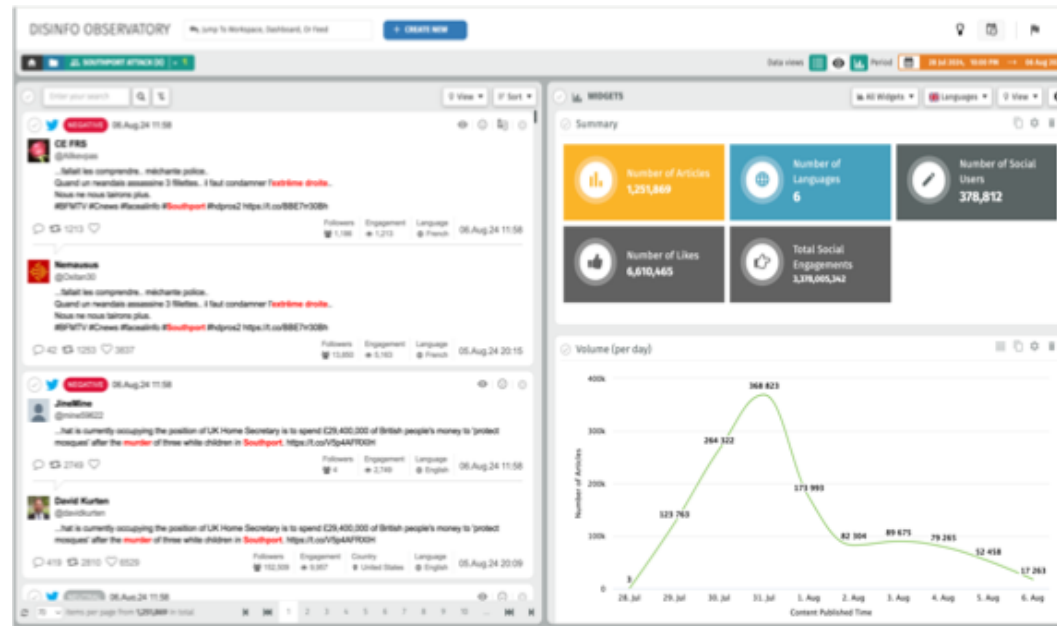
How do we build shields of resilience around our communities?



The (de)radicalization process and its determinants. Doosje B, De Wolf A, Mann L, Feddes AR (2016)

Concluding Reflections and Future Directions

- Future directions include establishing disinformation observatories with a comprehensive and research-backed catalog of narratives that tracks, monitors, and tags narratives in real-time, including the groups and networks through which they are laundered, as well as the seeding points, vectors, and amplifiers.
- This will provide the needed data for a systematic study of the patterns of narratives, including their transmission and consumption patterns, and the impacts of countermeasures.



**WHERE THERE IS NO THEORY OF DISINFORMATION: Three
Maxims to Guide Counternarrative Strategies**

Dr. Jacob Udo-Udo Jacob

