

The Art of Propaganda

Courtesy of *The Institute for Propaganda Analysis*

Propaganda is the deliberate use of any form of communication designed to affect the minds, emotions, and actions of a given group for a specific purpose.

The word *propaganda* has a negative connotation; therefore, people often associate it with dishonesty and lies ... propaganda is MANIPULATION!

Consider the following quotes:

- “All propaganda has to be popular and has to adapt its spiritual level to the perception of the least intelligent of those towards whom it intends to direct itself.” –Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (“My Struggle”), Vol. I
- “There was no point in seeking to convert the intellectuals. For intellectuals would never be converted and would anyway always yield to the stronger, ‘and this will always be the man in the street.’ Arguments must therefore be crude, clear and forcible, and appeal to emotions and instincts, not the intellect. Truth was unimportant and subordinate to tactics and psychology... Hatred and contempt must be directed at particular individuals.” –H. Trevor-Roper (ed), *The Goebbels Diaries*, p. XX, cited in Regan, Geoffrey. 1987. *Great Military Disasters*. New York: M. Evans and Company.
- "If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it. The lie can be maintained only for such time as the State can shield the people from the political, economic and/or military consequences of the lie. It thus becomes vitally important for the State to use all of its powers to repress dissent, for the truth is the mortal enemy of the lie, and thus by extension, the truth is the greatest enemy of the State.” –Dr. Joseph Goebbels, Minister of Propaganda for German government (1933-1945).

This packet discusses various propaganda techniques, provides contemporary examples of their use, and proposes strategies of mental self-defense.

In 1937, the *Institute for Propaganda Analysis* was created to educate the American public about the widespread nature of political propaganda. Composed of social scientists and journalists, the IPA published a series of books, including:

- *The Fine Art of Propaganda*
- *Propaganda Analysis*
- *Group Leader’s Guide to Propaganda Analysis*
- *Propaganda: How To Recognize and Deal With It*

The IPA’s basic goal is promoting critical thought among citizens: “It is essential in a democratic society that young people and adults learn how to think, learn how to make up their minds. They must learn how to think independently, and they must learn how to think together. They must come to conclusions, but at the same time, they must recognize the right of other men to come to opposite conclusions. So far as individuals are concerned, the art of democracy is the art of thinking and discussing independently together.”¹

Propaganda thus differs fundamentally from scientific analysis. The propagandist tries to “put something across,” good or bad. The scientist does not try to put anything across; he devotes his life to the discovery of new facts and principles. The propagandist seldom wants careful scrutiny and criticism; his object is to bring about a specific action. The scientist, on the other hand, is always prepared for and wants the most careful scrutiny and criticism of his facts and ideas. *Science flourishes on criticism. Dangerous propaganda crumbles before it.*”²

Why Learn About Propaganda?

It may seem strange to suggest that the study of propaganda has relevance to contemporary politics. After all, when most people think about propaganda, they think of the enormous campaigns that were waged by Hitler and Stalin in the 1930s. Since nothing comparable is being disseminated in our society today, many believe that propaganda is no longer an issue.

Propaganda’s persuasive techniques are regularly applied by **politicians, advertisers, journalists, television and radio personalities, and others who are interested in influencing human behavior.**

As Anthony Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson point out, “every day we are bombarded with one persuasive communication after another. These appeals persuade not through the give-and-take of argument and debate, but through the manipulation of symbols and of our most basic human emotions. For better or worse, ours is an age of propaganda.”³

With the growth of communication tools like the Internet, the flow of persuasive messages has been dramatically accelerated. For the first time ever, citizens around the world are participating in many uncensored conversations. This is a wonderful development, but there is a cost. The information revolution has led to information overload, and people are confronted with hundreds of messages each day. Although few studies have looked at this topic, it seems fair to suggest that many people respond to this pressure by processing messages more quickly and, when possible, by taking mental short-cuts.

1. Assertion:

Assertion is commonly used in advertising and modern propaganda. An assertion is an enthusiastic or energetic statement presented as a fact, although it is not necessarily true. They often imply that the statement requires no explanation or back up, but that it should merely be accepted without question. Examples of assertion, although somewhat scarce in wartime propaganda, can be found often in modern advertising propaganda. Any time an advertiser states that their product is the best without providing evidence for this, they are using an assertion. The subject, ideally, should simply agree to the statement without searching for additional information or reasoning. Assertions, although usually simple to spot, are often dangerous forms of propaganda because they often include falsehoods or lies.

2. Bandwagon:

Bandwagon is one of the most common techniques in both wartime and peacetime and plays an important part in modern advertising. Bandwagon is also one of the seven main propaganda techniques identified by the Institute for Propaganda Analysis in 1938. Bandwagon is an appeal to the subject to follow the crowd, to join in because others are doing so as well. Bandwagon propaganda is, essentially, trying to convince the subject that one side is the winning side, because more people have joined it. The subject is meant to believe that since so many people have joined, that victory is inevitable and defeat impossible. Since the average person always wants to be on the winning side, he or she is compelled to join in. However, in modern propaganda, bandwagon has taken a new twist. The subject is to be convinced by the propaganda that since everyone else is doing it,

they will be left out if they do not. This is, effectively, the opposite of the other type of bandwagon, but usually provokes the same results. Subjects of bandwagon are compelled to join in because everyone else is doing so as well. When confronted with bandwagon propaganda, we should weigh the pros and cons of joining in independently from the amount of people who have already joined, and, as with most types of propaganda, we should seek more information.

3. Card stacking:

Card stacking, or selective omission, involves only presenting information that is positive to an idea or proposal and omitting information contrary to it. Card stacking is used in almost all forms of propaganda, and is extremely effective in convincing the public. Although the majority of information presented by the card stacking approach is true, it is dangerous because it omits important information. The best way to deal with card stacking is to get more information.

4. Glittering Generalities:

Glittering generalities occurs very often in politics and political propaganda. Glittering generalities are words that have different positive meaning for individual subjects, but are linked to highly valued concepts. When these words are used, they demand approval without thinking, simply because such an important concept is involved. For example, when a person is asked to do something in "defense of democracy" they are more likely to agree. The concept of democracy has a positive connotation to them because it is linked to a concept that they value. Words often used as glittering generalities are honor, glory, love of country, and especially in the United States, freedom. When coming across with glittering generalities, we should especially consider the merits of the idea itself when separated from specific words.

5. Lesser of Two Evils:

The *lesser of two evils* technique tries to convince us of an idea or proposal by presenting it as the least offensive option. This technique is often implemented during wartime to convince people of the need for sacrifices or to justify difficult decisions. This technique is often accompanied by adding blame on an enemy country or political group. One idea or proposal is often depicted as one of the only options or paths. When confronted with this technique, the subject should consider the value of any proposal independently of those it is being compared with.

6. Name Calling:

Name calling occurs often in politics and wartime scenarios, but very seldom in advertising. It is another of the seven main techniques designated by the Institute for Propaganda Analysis. It is the use of derogatory language or words that carry a negative connotation when describing an enemy. The propaganda attempts to arouse prejudice among the public by labeling the target something that the public dislikes. Often, name calling is employed using sarcasm and ridicule, and shows up often in political cartoons or writings. When examining name calling propaganda, we should attempt to separate our feelings about the name and our feelings about the actual idea or proposal.

7. Pinpointing the Enemy:

Pinpointing the enemy is used extremely often during wartime, and also in political campaigns and debates. This is an attempt to simplify a complex situation by presenting one specific group or person as the enemy. Although there may be other factors involved the subject is urged to simply view the situation in terms of clear-cut right and wrong. When coming in contact with this technique, the subject should attempt to consider all

other factors tied into the situation. As with almost all propaganda techniques, the subject should attempt to find more information on the topic. An informed person is much less susceptible to this sort of propaganda.

8. Plain Folks:

The *plain folks* propaganda technique is an attempt by the propagandist to convince the public that his views reflect those of the common person and that they are also working for the benefit of the common person. The propagandist will often attempt to use the accent of a specific audience as well as using specific idioms or jokes. Also, the propagandist, especially during speeches, may attempt to increase the illusion through imperfect pronunciation, stuttering, and a more limited vocabulary. Errors such as these help add to the impression of sincerity and spontaneity. This technique is usually most effective when used with glittering generalities, in an attempt to convince the public that the propagandist views about highly valued ideas are similar to their own and therefore more valid. When confronted by this type of propaganda, the subject should consider the proposals and ideas separately from the personality of the presenter.

9. Simplification (Stereotyping):

Simplification is extremely similar to pinpointing the enemy, in that it often reduces a complex situation to a clear-cut choice involving good and evil. This technique is often useful in swaying uneducated audiences. When faced with simplification, it is often useful to examine other factors and pieces of the proposal or idea, and, as with all other forms of propaganda, it is essential to get more information.

10. Testimonials:

Testimonials are another of the seven main forms of propaganda identified by the Institute for Propaganda Analysis. Testimonials are quotations or endorsements, in or out of context, which attempt to connect a famous or respectable person with a product or item. Testimonials are very closely connected to the transfer technique, in that an attempt is made to connect an agreeable person to another item. Testimonials are often used in advertising and political campaigns. When coming across testimonials, the subject should consider the merits of the item or proposal independently of the person or organization giving the testimonial.

11. Transfer:

Transfer is often used in politics and during wartime. It is an attempt to make the subject view a certain item in the same way as they view another item, to link the two in the subject's mind. Although this technique is often used to transfer negative feelings for one object to another, it can also be used in positive ways. By linking an item to something the subject respects or enjoys, positive feelings can be generated for it. However, in politics, transfer is most often used to transfer blame or bad feelings from one politician to another of his friends or party members, or even to the party itself. When confronted with propaganda using the transfer technique, we should question the merits or problems of the proposal or idea independently of convictions about other objects or proposals.

12. Euphemisms

When propagandists use glittering generalities and name-calling symbols, they are attempting to arouse their audience with vivid, emotionally suggestive words. In certain situations, however, the propagandist attempts to pacify the audience in order to make an unpleasant reality more palatable. This is accomplished by using words that are bland and euphemistic.

A euphemism is a technique that uses the substitution of a mild, indirect, or vague expression for one thought to be offensive, harsh, or blunt. Consider that since war is particularly unpleasant, military discourse is full of

euphemisms. In the 1940's, America changed the name of the War Department to the Department of Defense. Under the Reagan Administration, the MX-Missile was renamed "The Peacekeeper." During wartime, civilian casualties are referred to as "collateral damage," and the word "liquidation" is used as a synonym for "murder." The comedian George Carlin notes that, in the wake of the First World War, traumatized veterans were said to be suffering from "shell shock." The short, vivid phrase conveys the horrors of battle—one can practically hear the shells exploding overhead. After the Second World War, people began to use the term "combat fatigue" to characterize the same condition. The phrase is a bit more pleasant, but it still acknowledges combat as the source of discomfort... In the wake of the Vietnam War, people referred to "post-traumatic stress disorder": a phrase that is completely disconnected from the reality of war altogether.

Examples of Euphemisms:

What it Says	What it Means	What it Says	What it Means
adult entertainment	pornography	expecting	pregnant
armed intervention	war	freedom fighters	rebels
between jobs	unemployed	full bodied	obese
bun in the oven	pregnant	house of ill repute	brothel
character line	wrinkle	imbibe	drink alcohol
collateral damage	civilian casualties	inventory leakage	theft
comfort women	prostitutes	lose your lunch	vomit
correctional facility	prison	neutralize	to kill
direct mail	junk mail	pre-owned	used
disinformation	lie	remains	dead body
do your business	defecate	revenue enhancement	taxes

13. Fear

When a propagandist warns members of her audience that disaster will ensue if they do not follow a particular course of action, she is using the fear appeal. By playing on the audience's deep-seated fears, practitioners of this technique hope to redirect attention away from the merits of a particular proposal and toward steps that can be taken to reduce the fear.

"The streets of our country are in turmoil. The universities are filled with students rebelling and rioting. Communists are seeking to destroy our country. Russia is threatening us with her might, and the Republic is in danger. Yes - danger from within and without. We need law and order! Without it our nation cannot survive." –Adolf Hitler, 1932

This technique can be highly effective when wielded by a fascist demagogue, but it is usually used in less dramatic ways. Consider the following:

- A television commercial portrays a terrible automobile accident (the fear appeal), and reminds viewers to wear their seatbelts (the fear-reducing behavior).
- A pamphlet from an insurance company includes pictures of houses destroyed by floods (the fear appeal), and follows up with details about homeowners' insurance (the fear-reducing behavior).
- A letter from a pro-gun organization begins by describing a lawless America in which only criminals own guns (the fear appeal), and concludes by asking readers to oppose a ban on automatic weapons (the fear-reducing behavior).

Ever since the end of World War II, social psychologists and communication scholars have been conducting empirical studies in order to learn more about the effectiveness of fear appeals. Some have criticized the conceptualization of the studies, and others have found fault with the experimental methods, but the general conclusions are worth considering, if not accepting.

- “All other things being equal, the more frightened a person is by a communication, the more likely her or she is to take positive preventive action.”
- Fear appeals will not succeed in altering behavior if the audience feels powerless to change the situation.
- Fear appeals are more likely to succeed in changing behavior if they contain specific recommendations for reducing the threat that the audience believes are both effective and doable.

A successful fear appeal has four elements:

1. A threat
2. A specific recommendation about how the audience should behave
3. Audience perception that the recommendation will be effective in addressing the threat
4. Audience perception that they are capable of performing the recommended behavior.

When fear appeals do not include all four elements, they are likely to fail. Pratkanis and Aronson provide the example of the anti-nuclear movement, which successfully aroused public fear of nuclear war, but offered few specific recommendations that people perceived as effective or doable. By contrast, fall-out shelters were enormously popular during the 1950s because people believed that shelters would protect them from nuclear war, and installing a shelter was something that they could do.

In a similar fashion, during the 1964 campaign, Lyndon Johnson was said to have swayed many voters with a well-known television commercial that portrayed a young girl being annihilated in a nuclear blast. This commercial linked nuclear war to Barry Goldwater (Johnson’s opponent), and proposed a vote for Johnson as an effective, doable way of avoiding the threat.

In contemporary politics, the fear-appeal continues to be widespread. When a politician agitates the public’s fear of immigration, or crime, and proposes that voting for her will reduce the threat, she is using this technique.

Bad Logic or Propaganda?

Logic is the process of drawing a conclusion from one or more premises. A statement of fact, by itself, is neither logical nor illogical (although it can be true or false). As an example of how logic can be abused, consider the following argument which has been widely propagated on the Internet.

- Premise 1: The Philadelphia Phillies wear red uniforms.
Premise 2: Red is the color of communism worldwide.
Conclusion: The Phillies are communists.

One way of testing the logic of an argument like this is to translate the basic terms and see if the conclusion still makes sense. As you can see, the premises may be correct, but the conclusion does not necessarily follow.

- Premise 1: All Catholics believe in God.
Premise 2: All Muslims believe in God.
Conclusion: All Catholics are Muslims.

Note: A message can be illogical *without* being propagandistic—we all make logical mistakes. The difference is that propagandists *deliberately* manipulate logic in order to promote their cause.

Extrapolation is what scientists call the tendency to make huge predictions about the future based on a few small facts. Such predictions should come with the warning that they must be used with caution. This logical sleight of hand often provides the basis for an effective fear-appeal. Consider the following contemporary examples:

If Congress passes legislation limiting the availability of automatic weapons, America will slide down a slippery slope, which will ultimately result in the banning of all guns, the destruction of the Constitution, and a totalitarian police state.

White, Grey, and Black Propaganda

White propaganda comes from an acknowledged source. This type of propaganda is associated with overt psychological operations.

Grey propaganda does not clearly identify any source.

Black propaganda purports to emanate from a source *other* than the true one. This type of propaganda is associated with covert psychological operations.

Here is an example of White Propaganda:

Ask yourself...

- Who/what is the acknowledged source?
- What is the purpose of the poster?
- Who benefits if the poster's message is followed?



Here is an example of Grey Propaganda:

Desertion Leaflet from Bunker Hill

	Officers	Enlisted Men
Quarters:	<i>Prospect Hill</i>	<i>Bunker Hill</i>
Wages:	seven dollars a month	three pence a day
Rations:	fresh provisions, and in plenty	rotten salt pork
Health:	good health	the scurvy
Retirement:	freedom, ease, affluence, and a good farm	slavery, beggary and want

This leaflet does not indicate its source, so it is grey propaganda. “Artful use was made of the sharp class distinctions then existing between British officers and enlisted men; fear was exploited as an aid to persuasion; the language was pointed.” Linebarger calls this “a classic example of how to do good field propaganda.”

A Nazi leaflet, *The Girl You Left Behind* shows an American soldier's girlfriend being courted, and eventually seduced, by Jewish war profiteer "Sam Levy." The soldier eventually comes home without a leg to find his girl in a fur coat and in the possession of the Jew. "Sam has no scruples about getting a bit intimate with Joan. And why should he have any? Tall and handsome Bob Harrison, Joan's fiancé, is on the front, thousands of miles away, fighting for guys like Sam Levy." The effectiveness of this leaflet's anti-Semitism among American GIs might have been dampened by the presence of Jewish buddies at the front ("The Jewish guy in my outfit is roughing it out here with the rest of us"), but it could still have promoted the idea that certain privileged individuals could avoid military service and profit from the war.

Here is an example of Black Propaganda:

Guard Against Venereal Diseases

Lately there has been a great increase in the number of venereal diseases among our officers and men owing to prolific contacts with Filipino women of dubious character.

Due to hard times and stricken conditions brought about by the Japanese occupation of the islands, Filipino women are willing to offer themselves for a small amount of foodstuffs. It is advisable in such cases to take full protective measures by use of condoms, protective medicines, etc.; better still to hold intercourse only with wives, virgins, or women of respective [sic] character.

Furthermore, in view of the increase in pro-American leanings, many Filipino women are more than willing to offer themselves to American soldiers, and due to the fact that Filipinos have no knowledge of hygiene, disease carriers are rampant and due care must be taken.

This appears to be an anti-VD leaflet that was given to American troops, BUT it was actually dropped on Filipinos by the *Japanese!* The Japanese propagandists wanted Filipinos to believe that the United States was the origin of this derogatory material, thereby reducing their cooperation with the United States.

➤ Mistakes in Propaganda

Do not direct propaganda against the opposing side's rank-and-file. Hate Propaganda must be directed only against the enemy leaders. They are the people whom you want to persuade to cease resistance, malingering, desert, mutiny, or even change sides. Highly effective wartime propaganda seeks to drive a wedge between the other side's leaders and its rank-and-file members.

For psychological warfare purposes, the enemy is defined as: (1) the ruler, (2) the ruling group, (3) unspecified manipulators, (4) any definite minority. The rank-and-file member of the opposing side is *not* the enemy. He or she is a *victim* of the enemies suggested by Linebarger. Linebarger states:

The [skilled] psychological warfare operator will try to get enemy troops to believe that the enemy is really their own leadership—the King, the Fuhrer, the elite troops, the capitalists, etc. . . . The message is, *We're not fighting you. We are fighting the people who are misleading you.* (51)

Notes

¹ a nice quote from *The Fine Art of Propaganda*

² Ibid

³ strong work by Pratkanis and Aronson, 1991

⁴ another good quote from the Institute for Propaganda Analysis, 1938

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All material is the property of Paul Myron Anthony Linebarger's *Psychological Warfare*, published by Combat Forces Press, Washington (1954).

Sites: <http://www.propagandacritic.com/articles/about.html> & <http://www.stentorian.com/propagan.html>