Understanding and Recognizing Propaganda

Propaganda | Definition by Merriam-Webster

propaganda noun

pro·pa·gan·da prä-pə-ˈgan-də prō-

1. [capitalized]: a congregation of the Roman curia having jurisdiction over missionary territories and related institutions

2: the spreading of ideas, information, or rumor for the purpose of helping or injuring an institution, a cause, or a person

3: ideas, facts, or allegations spread deliberately to further one's cause or to damage an opposing cause

also: a public action having such an effect

"propaganda." *Merriam-Webster.com*. 2025. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/propaganda (24 January 2025).

Types of Propaganda

The following paragraphs describe the 10 most common propaganda techniques, give examples of how they are used, and give pointers so you can recognize them. The purpose of this article is to empower you to form your own opinions without the influence of propaganda. Here is a list of the techniques covered:

1. Name-Calling
2. Glittering Generalities
3. Transfer
4. False Analogy
5. Testimonial
6. Plain Folks
7. Card Stacking
8. Bandwagon

9. Either/or Fallacy
10. Faulty Cause and Effect
11. Spinning the Issues

1. Name-Calling

This technique associates a negative name with a person or a thing. This is used when people are trying to avoid supporting their own opinion with facts. Instead of explaining what they believe in, they diminish their opponent's position by name-calling. Examples of this technique include racists, sexists, homophobic, Marxists, socialists, and Fascists.

When experiencing name-calling, ask yourself the following questions:

- What does the name or label mean to me?
- Does the idea in question have a valid connection with the real meaning of the name or label?
- Is it an idea that serves my best interests being dismissed by giving it a name I don't like?
- If I remove the name, what are the merits of the idea by itself?

2. Glittering Generalities

This technique uses important-sounding "glad words" that have little or no real meaning. These words are used in general statements that cannot be proved or disproved. Glad words are usually adjectives used to enhance the idea being presented. They include words like "good," "honest," "fair," "excellent," and "best.". When confronted with Glad Words, ask yourself the following questions:

- What does the glad word really mean to me?
- Does the presented idea validly connect with how the word is being used?
- .Are they trying to sell me something that is not in my best interests by using words I like?
- If the glad word is removed, does the idea still have merit?

3. Transfer

In this technique, an attempt is made to transfer the prestige of a positive symbol to a person or an idea. For example, using the American flag on the side of a bus for a political event suggests that the event includes a form of patriotism. Gun sights in red or blue on regions of a map suggest that those are the targeted regions by the party affiliation. When confronted with the transfer device, ask the following questions:

- In the most simple and valid terms, what is being proposed?
- What is the meaning of the thing from which the propagandist is seeking to transfer authority, sanction, and prestige?
- Is there any legitimate connection between the proposal of the propagandist and the revered thing, person, or institution?

- If the symbol is removed, does the proposal still have merit?

4. False Analogy

In a false analogy, two concepts or events are associated with each other without any specific evidence indicating a cause-and-effect relationship. An example is: People who drink caffeinated coffee don't sleep well; Nancy drinks caffeinated coffee, and therefore she does not sleep well.

When examining the comparison, ask yourself how similar the items are. In most false analogies, there is simply not enough evidence available to support the comparison.

5. Testimonial

This technique is easy to understand. It is when "big name" personalities are used to endorse a product, person, or organization. Whenever you see someone famous endorsing these things, ask yourself how much that person knows about that thing and what he or she stands to gain by promoting it. Politicians and commercial ads use this all the time. An example would be a well-known, very wealthy person endorsing a politician's campaign.

6. Plain Folks

This technique uses a folksy approach to convince us to support someone or something. These ads show people with ordinary looks doing ordinary activities like riding a bicycle, fishing with the family, etc. When viewing this technique, we should suspend judgment and ask ourselves the following questions:

- What are the propagandist's ideas worth when divorced from his or her personality?
- What could he or she be trying to cover up with the plain-folks approach?
- What are the facts?

7. Card Stacking

This term comes from stacking a deck of cards in your favor. Card stacking is used to slant a message. Keywords or unfavorable statistics may be omitted in an ad or commercial, leading to a series of half-truths. Here are two examples of card stacking used in slogans: "Are you ready for some real food?' "We wouldn't serve it if it didn't taste better."

Keep in mind that an advertiser is under no obligation "to give the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

8. Bandwagon

The "bandwagon" approach encourages you to think that because everyone else is doing something, you should do it too, or you'll be left out. The technique embodies a "keeping up with the Joneses" philosophy. This technique is used to create momentum for movements.

It may be helpful to ask the following questions:

- What is this program really about?

- What is the evidence for and against the program?
- Should I support this program, regardless of how others feel?
- Does the program serve or undermine my values and beliefs?

9. Either/or Fallacy

This technique is also called "black-and-white thinking" because only two choices are given. You are either for something or against it; there is no middle ground or shades of gray. It is used to polarize issues and negates all attempts to find common ground. Example: "You are either for Democracy, or you are against it. A limited number of options (usually two) is given, while in reality, there are more options.

10. Faulty Cause and Effect

This technique suggests that because B follows A, A must cause B. Remember, just because two events or two sets of data are related does not necessarily mean that one caused the other to happen. It is important to evaluate data carefully before jumping to a wrong conclusion.

As an example of how logic can be abused, consider the following argument:

- Premise 1: Joe Smith supports gun-control legislation.
- Premise 2: All fascist organizations have passed gun-control legislation.
- Conclusion: Therefore, Joe Smith is a fascist.

11. Spinning the Issues

Spinning the issues is another form of propaganda that is very subtle and yet very sophisticated. It involves the use of substituting words and phrases that have a particular meaning with other similar words and phrases that change the thinking of the audience to manipulate the outcome in favor of the "Spinner." The following is a list of dos and don'ts that Republican Strategist Frank Luntz told the governor's convention how to substitute words and phrases to change how republicans talk about the Occupy Wall Street Movement.

- How Republicans are being taught to talk about Occupy Wall Street

Russo, M. (2022, October 13). How to Recognize Propaganda (With Examples). *HubPages*. https://discover.hubpages.com/politics/The-Anatomy-of-Propaganda

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propaganda, dissemination of information—facts, arguments, rumours, half-truths, or lies—to influence public opinion. It is often conveyed through mass media.

Propaganda is the more or less systematic effort to manipulate other people's beliefs, attitudes, or actions by means of symbols (words, gestures, banners, monuments, music, clothing, insignia, hairstyles, designs on coins and postage stamps, and so forth). Deliberateness and a relatively heavy emphasis on manipulation distinguish propaganda from casual conversation or the free and easy exchange of ideas. Propagandists have a specified goal or set of goals. To achieve these, they deliberately select facts, arguments, and displays of symbols and present them in ways they think will have the most effect. To maximize effect, they may omit or distort pertinent facts or simply lie, and they may try to divert the attention of the reactors (the people they are trying to sway) from everything but their own propaganda.

Comparatively deliberate selectivity and manipulation also distinguish propaganda from education. Educators try to present various sides of an issue—the grounds for doubting as well as the grounds for believing the statements they make, and the disadvantages as well as the advantages of every conceivable course of action. Education aims to induce reactors to collect and evaluate evidence for themselves and assists them in learning the techniques for doing so. It must be noted, however, that some propagandists may look upon themselves as educators and may believe that they are uttering the purest truth, that they are emphasizing or distorting certain aspects of the truth only to make a valid message more persuasive, or that the courses of action that they recommend are in fact the best actions that the reactor could take. By the same token, the reactor who regards the propagandist's message as self-evident truth may think of it as educational; this often seems to be the case with "true believers"—dogmatic reactors to dogmatic religious, social, or political propaganda. "Education" for one person may be "propaganda" for another.

Signs, symbols, and media used in contemporary propaganda

Contemporary propagandists with money and imagination can use a very wide range of signs, symbols, and media to convey their messages. Signs are simply stimuli—"information bits" capable of stimulating, in some way, the human organism. These include sounds, such as words, music, or a 21-gun salvo; gestures (a military salute, a thumbed nose); postures (a weary slump, folded arms, a sit-down, an aristocratic bearing); structures (a monument, a building); items of clothing (a uniform, a civilian suit); visual signs (a poster, a flag, a picket sign, a badge, a printed page, a commemorative postage stamp, a swastika scrawled on a wall); and so on and on.

A symbol is a sign having a particular meaning for a given reactor. Two or more reactors may of course attach quite different meanings to the same symbol. Thus, to Nazis the swastika was a symbol of racial superiority and the crushing military might of the German *Volk*; to some Asiatic and North American peoples it is a symbol of universal peace and happiness. Some Christians who find a cross reassuring may find a hammer and sickle displeasing and may derive no religious satisfaction at all from a Muslim crescent, a Hindu cow, or a Buddhist lotus.

The contemporary propagandist can employ elaborate social-scientific research facilities, unknown in previous epochs, to conduct opinion surveys and psychological interviews in efforts to learn the symbolic meanings of given signs for given reactors around the world and to discover what signs leave given reactors indifferent because, to them, these signs are without meaning.

Media are the means—the channels—used to convey signs and symbols to the intended reactor or reactors. A comprehensive inventory of media used in 20th- and 21st-century propaganda could cover many pages. Electronic media include e-mail, blogs, Web- or application (app)-based social networking platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, and electronic versions of originally printed media such as newspapers, magazines, and books. Printed media include, in addition to those just mentioned, letters, handbills, posters, billboards, and handwriting on walls and streets. Among audiovisual media, the Internet and television may be the most powerful for many purposes. Both can convey a great many types of signs simultaneously; they can gain heavy impact from mutually reinforcing gestures, words, postures, and sounds and a background of symbolically significant leaders, celebrities, historic settings, architectures, flags, music, placards, maps, uniforms, insignia, cheering or jeering mobs or studio audiences, and staged assemblies of prestigious or powerful people. Other audiovisual media include public speakers, movies, theatrical productions, marching bands, mass demonstrations, picketing, face-to-face conversations between individuals, and “talking” exhibits at fairs, expositions, and art shows.

The larger the propaganda enterprise, the more important are such mass media as the Internet and television and also the organizational media—that is, pressure groups set up under leaders and technicians who are skilled in using many sorts of signs and media to convey messages to particular reactors. Vast systems of diverse organizations can be established in the hope of reaching leaders and followers of all groups (organized and unorganized) in a given area, such as a city, region, nation or coalition of nations, or the entire world. Pressure organizations are especially necessary, for example, in closely fought sales campaigns or political elections, especially in socially heterogeneous areas that have extremely divergent regional traditions, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, and educational levels and very unequal income distributions. Diversities of these sorts make it necessary for products to be marketed in local terms and for political candidates to appear to be friends of each of perhaps a dozen or more mutually hostile ethnic groups, of the educated and the uneducated, and of the very wealthy as well as the poverty-stricken.

The components of propaganda

Contemporary propagandists employing behavioral theory tend to analyze their problem in terms of at least 10 questions:

1. What are the goals of the propaganda? (What changes are to be brought about? In whom? And when?)

2. What are the present and expected conditions in the world social system?

3. What are the present and expected conditions in each of the subsystems of the world social system (such as international regions, nations, lesser territories, interest groups)?

4. Who should distribute the propaganda—the propagandists or their agents?

5. What symbols should be used?

6. What media should be used?

7. Which reactors should the propaganda be aimed at?

8. How can the effects of the propaganda be measured?

9. By what countermeasures can opponents neutralize or suppress the propaganda?

10. How can such countermeasures be measured and dealt with?

In the present state of social science, this 10-part problem can be solved with only moderate confidence with respect to any really major propaganda campaign, even if one has a great deal of money for research. Yet if propagandists are to proceed as rationally as possible, they need the best answers that are available.

Goals

Goals are fairly easy to define if propagandists simply want to sell a relatively safe, useful, and simple good or service. When propagandists aim to convert great numbers of people to a religion or a new social order or to induce extremely dangerous collective action like a war or revolution, however, the definition of goals becomes highly complex. It is complicated further by problems about "means–goals" or intermediate goals: probably the campaign will have to go on for a long time and will have to be planned in stages, phases, or waves. Propagandists may find it hard to specify, even to themselves, exactly what beliefs, values, or actions they want to bring about, by what points in time, among different sorts of people. Very large and firmly held complexes of values are involved, such as prestige, peace of mind, income, and even life itself or the military security of entire nations or regions—even, in modern times, the annihilation of all humankind. In such a situation, a mass of intricate and thorny value dilemmas arises: Is military or revolutionary victory worth the price of economic ruin? Can a desired degree of individual liberty be achieved without too much loss of social equality? Is a much quicker achievement of goals worth a much greater amount of human suffering? Are war crimes to be committed in order to win a battle? In short: What are the propagandists willing to risk, for what, across what periods of time?

Propagandists and their agents

The use of seemingly reputable, selfless, or neutral agents or so-called front organizations, while propagandists themselves remain behind the scenes, may greatly aid the propagandists. If the authorities are after the propagandists, seeking to suppress their activities, the propagandists must stay underground and work through agents. But even in freer circumstances, the

propagandists may wish someone else to speak for them. For instance, propagandists may not speak the reactors' language or idiom fluently. They may not know what reactors associate with given symbols. Or the reactors' cultural, racial, or religious feelings may bias them against propagandists and thus tend to deny them a favourable hearing. In such cases the use of agents is inescapable. Furthermore, if the propaganda fails or is exposed for what it is, the agents can be publicly scapegoated while the real propagandists continue to operate and develop new stratagems. The prince, said Machiavelli, may openly and conspicuously bestow awards and honours and public offices, but he should have his agents carry out all actions that make a man unpopular, such as punishments, denunciations, dismissals, and assassinations.

A complicated modern campaign on a major scale is likely to be planned most successfully by a collective leadership—a team of broadly educated and skilled people who have had both practical experience in public affairs and extensive training in history, psychology, and the social sciences. The detachment, skepticism, and secularism of such persons may, however, cause them to be viewed with great suspicion by many reactors. It may be important, therefore, to keep the planners behind the scenes and to select intermediaries—"front men," Trojan horses, and "dummy leaders" whom the reactors are more likely to listen to or appreciate.

Modern social-psychological research, dating from Freud's *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), makes clear the wisdom of traditional insights concerning the supreme importance of leadership in any group—be it the family, the nation, or the world social system. The rank and file of any group, especially a big one, have been shown to be remarkably passive until aroused by quasi-parental leaders whom members of the group admire and trust. It is hard to imagine the Gallic wars without Julius Caesar, the psychoanalytic movement without Freud, the Nazis without Adolf Hitler, or the major communist revolutions without Lenin and Mao Zedong and their politburos. These leaders were real—not dummies invented and packaged by image makers from an advertising agency or public relations firm. In the age of massive opinion researches, however, and with the aid of speech coaches and makeup artists and the magic impact of the Internet and television, it has become increasingly possible for image makers to create figureheads who can affect the votes and other behaviour of very large percentages of a national audience.

Selection and presentation of symbols

Propagandists must realize that neither rational arguments nor catchy slogans can, by themselves, do much to influence human behaviour. The behaviour of reactors is also affected by at least four other variables. The first is the reactors' predispositions—that is, their stored memories of, and their past associations with, related symbols. These often cause reactors to ignore the current inflow of symbols, to perceive them very selectively, or to rationalize them away. The second is the set of economic inducements (gifts, bribery, pay raises, threats of job loss, and so forth) which the propagandist or others may apply in conjunction with the symbols. The third is the set of physical inducements (love, violence, protection from violence) used by the propagandist or others. The fourth is the array of social pressures that may either encourage or

inhibit reactors in thinking or doing what the propagandist advocates. Even those who are well led and are predisposed to do what the propagandist wants may be prevented from acting by counterpressures within the surrounding social systems or groups of which they are a part.

In view of these predispositions and pressures, skilled propagandists are careful to advocate chiefly those acts that they believe the reactor already wants to perform and is in fact able to perform. It is fruitless to call upon most people to perform acts that may involve a total loss of income or terrible physical danger—for example, to act openly upon democratic leanings in a totalitarian fascist country. To call upon reactors to do something extremely dangerous or hard is to risk having the propaganda branded as unrealistic. In such cases, it may be better to point to actions that reactors can avoid taking—that is, to encourage them in acts of passive resistance. The propagandists will thereby both seem and be realistic in their demands upon the reactor, and the reactor will not be left with the feeling, "I agree with this message, but just what am I supposed to do about it?"

For maximum effect, the symbolic content of propaganda must be active, not passive, in tone. It must explicitly or implicitly recommend fairly specific actions to be performed by the reactor ("buy this," "boycott that," "vote for X," "join Group Y," "withdraw from Group Z"). Furthermore, because the ability of the human organism to receive and process symbols is strictly limited, skillful propagandists attempt to substitute quality for quantity in their choice of symbols. A brief slogan or a picture or a pithy comment on some symbol that is emotion laden for the reactors may be worth ten thousand other words and cost much less. In efforts to economize symbol inputs, propagandists attempt to make full use of the findings of all the behavioral sciences. They draw upon the psychoanalysts' studies of the bottled-up impulses in the unconscious mind, they consult the elaborate vocabulary counts produced by professors of education, they follow the headline news to determine what events and symbols probably are salient in reactors' minds at the moment, and they analyze the information polls and attitude studies conducted by survey researchers.

There is substantial agreement among psychoanalysts that the psychological power of propaganda increases with use of what Lasswell termed the triple-appeal principle. This principle states that a set of symbols is apt to be most persuasive if it appeals simultaneously to three elements of an individual's personality—elements that Freud labelled the ego, id, and superego. To appeal to the ego, skilled propagandists will present the acts and thoughts that they desire to induce as if they were rational, advisable, wise, prudent, and expedient; in the same breath they say or imply that they are sure to produce pleasure and a sense of strength (an appeal to the id); concurrently they suggest that they are moral, righteous, and—if not altogether legal—decidedly more justifiable and humane than the law itself (an appeal to the superego, or conscience). Within any social system, the optimal blend of these components varies from individual to individual and from subgroup to subgroup: some individuals and subgroups love pleasure intensely and show few traces of guilt; others are quite pained by guilt; few are continuously eager to be rational or to take the trouble to become well informed. Some cautious individuals and subgroups like to believe that they never make a move without preanalyzing it;

others enjoy throwing prudence to the winds. There are also changes in these blends through time: personalities change, as do the morals and customs of groups. In large collectivities like social classes, ethnic groups, or nations, the particular blends of these predispositions may vary greatly from stratum to stratum and subculture to subculture. Only the study of history and behavioral research can give the propagandist much guidance about such variations.

Propagandists are wise if, in addition to reiterating their support of ideas and policies that they know the reactor already believes in, they include among their images a variety of symbols associated with parents and parent surrogates. The child lives on in every adult, eternally seeking a loving father and mother. Hence the appeal of such familistic symbolisms as "the fatherland," "the mother country," "the Mother Church," "the Holy Father," "Mother Russia," and the large number of statesmen who are known as the "fathers of their countries." Also valuable are reassuring maternal figures like Queen Victoria of England, the Virgin Mary, and the Japanese sun goddess. In addition to parent symbols, it is usually well to associate one's propaganda with symbols of parent substitutes, who in some cases exert a more profound effect on children than do disappointing or nondescript parents: affectionate or amiable uncles (Uncle Sam, Uncle Ho Chi Minh); admired scholars and physicians (Karl Marx, Dr. Sun Yat-sen); politico-military heroes and role models (Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, Mao, "the wise, mighty, and fatherly Stalin"); and, of course, saintly persons (Joan of Arc, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., the Buddha). A talented and well-symbolized leader or role model may achieve a parental or even godlike ascendancy (charisma) and magnify the impact of a message many times.

Media of propaganda

There are literally thousands of electronic, written, audiovisual, and organizational media that a contemporary propagandist might use. All human groupings are potential organizational media, from the family and other small organizations through advertising and public relations firms, trade unions, churches and temples, theatres, readers of novels and poetry, special-interest groups, political parties and front organizations to the governmental structures of nations, international coalitions, and universal organizations like the United Nations and its agencies. From all this variety of media, propagandists must choose those few media (especially leaders, role models, and organizations) to whose messages they think the intended reactors are especially attentive and receptive.

In recent years the advent of personal computers and mobile phones and the development of the Internet has brought about a massive, worldwide proliferation of systems and facilities for news gathering, publishing, broadcasting, holding meetings, and speechmaking. At present, almost everyone's mind is bombarded daily by far more media, symbols, and messages than the human organism can possibly pay attention to. The mind reels under noisy assortments of information bits about rival politicians, rival political programs and doctrines, new technical discoveries, insistently advertised commercial products, and new views on morality, ecological horrors, and military nightmares. This sort of communication overload already has resulted in the alienation of millions of people from much of modern life. Overload and alienation can be expected to reach

even higher levels in coming generations as still higher densities of population, intercultural contacts, and communication facilities cause economic, political, doctrinal, and commercial rivalries to become still more intense.

Research has demonstrated repeatedly that most reactors attempt, consciously or unconsciously, to cope with severe communication overload by developing three mechanisms: selective attention, selective perception, and selective recall. That is, they pay attention to only a few media; they fail (often unconsciously) to perceive therein any large proportion of the messages that they find uncongenial; and, having perceived, even after this screening, a certain number of unpleasing messages, they repress these in whole or in part (i.e., cannot readily remember them). Contemporary propagandists therefore try to find out: (1) what formative experiences and styles of education have predisposed their intended audiences to their current "media preferences"; (2) which of all the Web sites, electronic or printed publications, television shows, leaders, and role models in the world they do in fact pay attention to; and (3) by which of these they are most influenced. These topics have thus become the subjects of vast amounts of commercial and academic research.

In most cases, reactors are found to pay the most attention to the Web sites, publications, shows, leaders, and role models with whose views they already agree. People as a rule attend to communications not because they want to learn something new or reconsider their own philosophies of life but because they seek psychological reassurance about their existing beliefs and prejudices. When propagandists do get people's attention by putting messages into the few media the people heed, they may discover that, to hold people's attention, they must draft a message that does not depart very far from what people already want to believe. Despite the popular stereotypes about geniuses of politics, religion, or advertising whose brilliant propaganda converts the multitudes overnight, the plain fact is that even the most skilled propagandist must usually content himself with a very modest goal: packaging a message in such a way that much of it is familiar and reassuring to the intended reactors and only a little is so novel or true as to threaten them psychologically. Thus, revivalists have an a priori advantage over spokespersons of a modernized ethic, and conservative politicians an advantage over progressives. Propaganda that aims to induce major changes is certain to take great amounts of time, resources, patience, and indirection, except in times of revolutionary crisis when old beliefs have been shattered and new ones have not yet been provided. In ordinary periods (intercrisis periods), propaganda for changes, however worthy, is likely to be, in the words of the German sociologist Max Weber, "a slow boring of hard boards."

For reasons just indicated, the most effective media as a rule (for messages other than the simplest of commercial advertising) are not the impersonal mass media like electronic and printed newspapers and news services and television but rather those few associations or organizations (reference groups) with which individuals feel identified or to which they aspire to relate their identity. Quite often, ordinary people not only avoid but actively distrust the mass media or fail to understand their messages, but in the warmth of a reference group they feel at home, assume that they understand what is going on, and feel that they are sure to receive a

certain degree of emotional response and personal protection. The foremost reference group, of course, is the family. But many other groups perform analogous functions—for instance, the group of sports fans, the church, the trade union, the club, the alumni group, the clique or gang. By influencing the key members of such a group, propagandists may establish a "social relay" channel that can amplify their message. By thus concentrating on the few, they increase their chances of reaching the many—often far more effectively than they could through a plethora of communications aimed at larger audiences. Therefore, one important stratagem involves the combined use of mass media and reference-group channels—preparing materials for such media as news releases or broadcasts in ways designed specifically to reach certain groups (and especially their elites and leaders), who can then relay the messages to other sets of reactors.

The reactors (audiences)

The audiences for the propagandist can be classified into: (1) those who are initially predisposed to react as the propagandist wishes, (2) those who are neutral or indifferent, and (3) those who are in opposition or perhaps even hostile.

As already indicated, propaganda is most apt to evoke the desired responses among those already in agreement with the propagandist's message. Neutrals or opponents are not apt to be much affected even by an intensive barrage of propaganda unless it is reinforced by nonpropagandistic inducements (economic or coercive acts) or by favourable social pressures. These facts, of course, are recognized by advocates of civil disobedience; their propagandists would contend that sloganeering and reasoned persuasion must be accompanied by sit-ins and other overt acts of passive resistance; they aim for a new climate of social pressure.

Countermeasures by opponents

Some countermeasures against propaganda include simply suppressing it by eliminating or jailing the propagandists, burning down their premises, intimidating their employees, buying them off, depriving them of their use of the media or the money that they need for the media or for necessary research, and applying countless other coercive or economic pressures. It is also possible to use counterpropaganda, hoping that the truth (or at least some artful bit of counterpropaganda) will prevail.

One special type of counterpropaganda is "source exposure"—informing the audience that the propagandists are ill-informed, are criminals, or belong to some group that is sure to be regarded by the audience as subversive, thereby undermining their credibility and perhaps their economic support. In the 1930s there was in the U.S. an Institute for Propaganda Analysis that tried to expose such propaganda techniques as "glittering generalities" or "name-calling" that certain propagandists were using. This countermeasure may have failed, however, because it was too intellectual and abstract and because it offered the audience no alternative leaders to follow or ideas to believe.

In many cases opponents of certain propagandists have succeeded in getting laws passed that have censored or suppressed propaganda or required registration and disclosure of the propagandists and of those who have paid them.

Measures against countermeasures

It is clear, then, that opponents may try to offset propaganda by taking direct action or by invoking covert pressures or community sanctions to bring it under control. Propagandists must therefore try to estimate in advance their opponents' intentions and capabilities and invent measures against their countermeasures. If the opponents rely only on counterpropaganda, the propagandists can try to outwit them. If they think that their opponents will withdraw advertising from their news publication or radio station, they may try to get alternative supporters. If they expect vigilantes or police persecution, they can go underground and rely, as the Russian communists did before 1917 and the Chinese before 1949, primarily on agitation through organizational media.

Social control of propaganda

Democratic control of propaganda

Different sorts of polities, ranging from the democratic to the authoritarian, have attempted a variety of social controls over propaganda. In an ideal democracy, everyone would be free to make propaganda and free to oppose propaganda habitually through peaceful counterpropaganda. The democratic ideal assumes that, if a variety of propagandists are free to compete continuously and publicly, the ideas best for society will win out in the long run. This outcome would require that a majority of the general populace be reasonably well-educated, intelligent, public-spirited, and patient, and that they not be greatly confused or alienated by an excess of communication. A democratic system also presupposes that large quantities of dependable and relevant information will be inexpensively disseminated by relatively well-financed, public-spirited, and uncensored news gathering and educational agencies. The extent to which any existing national society actually conforms to this model is decidedly an open question. That the world social system does not is self-evident.

In efforts to guard against "pernicious" propaganda by hidden persuaders, modern democracies sometimes require that such propagandists as lobbyists and publishers register with public authorities and that propaganda and advertising be clearly labelled as such. The success of such measures, however, is only partial. In the U.S., for instance, publishers of journals using the second-class mails are required to issue periodic statements of ownership, circulation, and other information; thereby, at least the nominal owners and publishers become known—but those who subsidize or otherwise control them may not. In many places, paid political advertisements in news publications or on television are required to include the name of a sponsor—but the declared sponsor may be a "dummy" individual or organization whose actual backers remain undisclosed. Furthermore, agents of foreign governments or organizations engaged in

propaganda in the U.S. are required to file forms with the U.S. Department of Justice, naming their principals and listing their own activities and finances—but it is impossible to know whether the data so filed are correct, complete, or significant. In many Western industrial nations, similar registrations and disclosures are required of those who circulate brochures inviting investors to buy stocks and bonds. This principle of disclosure, which appears so useful with respect to foreign agents and securities salesmen, is not often applied, however, to other media of propaganda. (In the U.S. the disclosure of certain types of political campaign advertisements and contributions is required, but the requirement is easily circumvented.) In many countries, claims made in propaganda (including advertising) about the contents or characteristics of foods and drugs and some other products are also subject to registration and to requirements of "plain labelling." In some places, consumer research organizations, privately or publicly supported, examine these claims rigorously and sometimes publish scientifically based counterpropaganda. In view of the apparently massive effects and the certainly massive expenses of political propaganda on the Internet and television, there are many movements afoot in democracies to limit expenditures on campaign propaganda and to require networks to give time free of charge for even the minor parties, especially in the weeks immediately preceding elections. There have also been movements to require that political propaganda be halted for a specified number of days before the holding of an election—the idea being that a cooling-off period would allow voters to rest and reflect after the communication overload of the campaign period and would prevent politicians and their backers from using last-minute slander and sensationalism.

Authoritarian control of propaganda

In a highly authoritarian polity, the regime tries to monopolize for itself all opportunities to engage in propaganda, and often it will stop at nothing to crush any kind of counterpropaganda. How long and how completely such a policy can be implemented depends, among other things, on the amount of force that the regime can muster, on the thoroughness of its police work, and, perhaps most of all, on the level, type, and distribution of secular higher education. Secular higher education invariably promotes skepticism about claims that sound dogmatic or are made without evidence; and if such education is of a type that emphasizes humane and universalistic values, an ignorant or unreasonable authoritarian regime is not likely to please the educated for very long. If the educated engage in discreet counterpropaganda, they may in the end modify the regime.

World-level control of propaganda

One of the most serious and least understood problems of social control is above the national level, at the level of the world social system. At the world level there is an extremely dangerous lack of means of restraining or counteracting propaganda that fans the flames of international, interracial, and interreligious wars. The global system consists at present of a highly chaotic mixture of democratic, semidemocratic, and authoritarian subsystems. Many of these are controlled by leaders who are ill educated, ultranationalistic, and religiously, racially, or doctrinally fanatical. At present, every national regime asserts that its national sovereignty gives it the right to conduct any propaganda it cares to, however untrue such propaganda may be and

however contradictory to the requirements of the world system. The most inflammatory of such propaganda usually takes the form of statements by prominent national leaders, often sensationalized and amplified by their own international broadcasts and sensationalized and amplified still further by media in the receiving countries. The only major remedy would lie, of course, in the slow spread of education for universalist humanism. A first step toward this might be taken through the fostering of an energetic and highly enlightened press corps and educational establishment, doing all it can to provide the world's broadcasters, news publications, and schools with factual information and illuminating editorials that could increase awareness of the world system as a whole. Informed leaders in world affairs are therefore becoming increasingly interested in the creation of world-level media and multinational bodies of reporters, researchers, editors, teachers, and other intellectuals committed to the unity of humankind.

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