

Propaganda

Propaganda: a message directly aimed at influencing the opinions and actions of others rather than impartially providing information. It may occur when

- Only certain favorable details are selected
- Details are purposefully distorted or falsified

A message does not have to be untrue to qualify as propaganda. **Omitting truth** is sometimes just as effective as lying. We call this “stacking the deck.”

Propaganda usually incorporates an **emotional appeal** as opposed to a rational argument.

Banners, slogan, and clichés are employed that provoke strong emotion or serve to reinforce old, learned assumptions. An **appeal to fear** is most effective in galvanizing public response.

Frequently these clichés and slogans are repeated as many times as possible in as many locations as possible. **“A lie repeated often enough becomes truth.”**

Dr Paul Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's Minister of Propaganda (1933-1945), invented the Big Lie theory; he exploited the German radio, press, cinema, and theatre to launch propaganda against the Jews and other groups. He claimed the bigger the lie, the greater the likelihood that people would believe it.

Language is a major tool of propagandists. **Loaded words** that illicit trigger responses or that suggest strong positive or negative connotations are employed to sway opinions.

Patriotism, evil-doers, evil-lution, godless atheists, courageous defenders of the faith

Often employed techniques:

Name calling
Appeal to fear
Appeal to authority
Tireless repetition
Join the bandwagon
Oversimplification of issues
Glittering generalities
Rationalization
Scapegoating
Stereotyping
Unstated Assumptions

Methods of transmission:

Historical revision
Posters
Television
Radio
Leaflets
Public-service announcements
Talk-shows
Government reports
Books
Junk science

How can we guard against propaganda?

Be wary of the *us vs. them* argument in which the speaker or writer challenges you to join with *reasonable* people to oppose the enemy. Such language is inherently divisive and erects barriers to working together to solve problems.

Has the speaker/writer resorted to name calling or guilt by association without any hard evidence? It is professional to talk about the issues, not to defame the speaker.

What might be the hidden motivations of the speaker/writer? Does he stand to profit in power or finances by his position?

Are emotional words, both negative and positive, peppered throughout a speech or writing that otherwise would lack real substance?

Has the speaker/writer introduced a "red herring" or a "straw man" to confuse you and win you to his side?

Is the real-life testimonial representative of a large group or was the yea-sayer hand selected? If the testimony is by a recognized authority, is he an authority in this field?

Is there an appeal to pity that drowns out all rational debate?

Are the ideas presented in a calm, rational manner addressing claims and counterclaims or does it incite the audience or reader to rash action?

If this is a scientific theory or article, has it been subjected to wide peer-review or has it been published in a reputable journal?

Has the speaker or writer created a false dilemma? You do not have to be either for them or against them. Reasonable people can sometimes assume the golden mean.

Are the consequences of disagreeing with the speaker/writer really as catastrophic as they imply?

Joining the bandwagon does not mean you are in the right. Some of the greatest historical abuses have been sanctioned by mob mentality.

Simply stating that "they started it first" is a rather juvenile way of rationalizing a harsh reaction. Considering the future consequences of one's actions should take precedence over revenge.

Above all, study the issue discussed. Following your in-depth research, more complex or competing details might sway you in the opposite direction. Even if they don't, you are on steadier ground.