Propaganda “Defined”

Persuasion Techniques
In order to *think*, you must analyze

In *The Fine Art of Propaganda*, the IPA stated that

*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.*
Introduction

Why think 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.

But propaganda can be as blatant as a swastika or as subtle as a joke. Its persuasive techniques are regularly applied by politicians, advertisers, journalists, radio personalities, and others who are interested in influencing human behavior. Propagandistic messages can be used to accomplish positive social ends, as in campaigns to reduce drunk driving, but they are also used to win elections and to sell malt liquor.

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." (Pratkanis and Aronson, 1991)

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 uncensored conversations about their collective future. This is a wonderful development, but there is a cost.
Think about propaganda…continued

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.

Propagandists love short-cuts -- particularly those which short-circuit rational thought. They encourage this by agitating emotions, by exploiting insecurities, by capitalizing on the ambiguity of language, and by bending the rules of logic. As history shows, they can be quite successful.

Propaganda analysis exposes the tricks that propagandists use and suggests ways of resisting the short-cuts that they promote. This web-site discusses various propaganda techniques, provides contemporary examples of their use, and proposes strategies of mental self-defense.

Propaganda analysis is an antidote to the excesses of the Information Age.
Common propaganda techniques

Word games
   - Name-calling
   - Glittering generalities
   - Euphemisms
False connections
   - Transfer
   - Testimonial
Special Appeals
   - Plain Folks
   - Bandwagon
   - Fear
Logical fallacies
   - Bad Logic or propaganda?
   - Unwarranted extrapolation
Name Calling

"Bad names have played a tremendously powerful role in the history of the world and in our own individual development. They have ruined reputations, stirred men and women to outstanding accomplishments, sent others to prison cells, and made men mad enough to enter battle and slaughter their fellowmen.

They have been and are applied to other people, groups, gangs, tribes, colleges, political parties, neighborhoods, states, sections of the country, nations, and races."

(Institute for Propaganda Analysis, 1938)
The name-calling technique links a person, or idea, to a negative symbol. The propagandist who uses this technique hopes that the audience will reject the person or the idea on the basis of the negative symbol, instead of looking at the available evidence.

The most obvious type of name calling involves bad names. For example, consider the following: **Commie, Fascist, Pig, Yuppie, Bum, Queer, Fag, Retard, Terrorist**

A more subtle form of name-calling involves words or phrases that are selected because they possess a negative emotional charge. Those who oppose budget cuts may characterize fiscally conservative politicians as "stingy." Supporters might prefer to describe them as "thrifty." Both words refer to the same behavior, but they have very different connotations. Other examples of negatively charged words include: **social engineering, radical, cowardly, un-patriotic, counter-culture**

Ask yourself these questions when confronted with this technique:
• What does the name mean?
• Does the idea in question have a legitimate connection with the real meaning of the name?
• Is an idea that serves my best interests being dismissed through giving it a name I don't like?
• Leaving the name out of consideration, what are the merits of the idea itself?
This is the list of **negative words** and phrases that GOP candidates were told to use when speaking about their opponents.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative Words</th>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Compassion&quot; is not enough.</td>
<td>Impose</td>
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<td>Anti-(issue) flag, family, child, jobs</td>
<td>Incompetent</td>
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<td>Betray</td>
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<td>Coercion</td>
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<td>Collapse</td>
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<td>Waste</td>
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Glittering Generality

The Glittering Generality is, in short, Name Calling in reverse. While Name Calling seeks to make us form a judgment to reject and condemn without examining the evidence, the Glittering Generality device seeks to make us approve and accept without examining the evidence. In acquainting ourselves with the Glittering Generality Device, therefore, all that has been said regarding Name Calling must be kept in mind..."

(Institute for Propaganda Analysis, 1938)

"We believe in, fight for, live by virtue words about which we have deep-set ideas. Such words include civilization, Christianity, good, proper, right, democracy, patriotism, motherhood, fatherhood, science, medicine, health, and love.

Ask yourself these questions when confronted with this technique:
• What does the virtue word really mean?
• Does the idea in question have a legitimate connection with the real meaning of the word:
• Is an idea that does not serve my best interests being "sold" to me merely through its being given a name that I like?
• Leaving the virtue word out of consideration, what are the merits of the idea itself?
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.

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 war-time, 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.
Transfer

You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorn. You shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold! ~ William Jennings Bryan, 1896

"Transfer is a device by which the propagandist carries over the authority, sanction, and prestige of something we respect and revere to something he would have us accept. For example, most of us respect and revere our church and our nation. If the propagandist succeeds in getting church or nation to approve a campaign in behalf of some program, he thereby transfers its authority, sanction, and prestige to that program. Thus, we may accept something which otherwise we might reject.

In the Transfer device, symbols are constantly used. The cross represents the Christian Church. The flag represents the nation. Cartoons like Uncle Sam represent a consensus of public opinion. Those symbols stir emotions. At their very sight, with the speed of light, is aroused the whole complex of feelings we have with respect to church or nation. A cartoonist, by having Uncle Sam disapprove a budget for unemployment relief, would have us feel that the whole United States disapproves relief costs. By drawing an Uncle Sam who approves the same budget, the cartoonist would have us feel that the American people approve it. Thus, the Transfer device is used both for and against causes and ideas." (Institute for Propaganda Analysis, 1938)
Transfer …

In a similar fashion, propagandists may attempt to transfer the reputation of "Science" or "Medicine" to a particular project or set of beliefs. A slogan for a popular cough drop encourages audiences to "Visit the halls of medicine." On TV commercials, actors in white lab coats tell us that the "Brand X is the most important pain reliever that can be bought without a prescription." In both of these examples, the transfer technique is at work.

These techniques can also take a more ominous turn. As Alfred Lee has argued, "even the most flagrantly anti-scientific racists are wont to dress up their arguments at times with terms and carefully selected illustrations drawn from scientific works and presented out of all accurate context." The propaganda of Nazi Germany, for example, rationalized racist policies by appealing to both science and religion.
Testimonial

There is nothing wrong with citing a qualified source, and the testimonial technique can be used to construct a fair, well-balanced argument. However, it is often used in ways that are unfair and misleading.

The most common misuse of the testimonial involves citing individuals who are not qualified to make judgments about a particular issue. In 1992, Barbara Streisand supported Bill Clinton, and Arnold Schwarzenegger threw his weight behind George Bush. Both are popular performers, but there is no reason to think that they know what is best for this country.

Unfair testimonials are usually obvious, and most of us have probably seen through this rhetorical trick at some time or another. However, this probably happened when the testimonial was provided by a celebrity that we did not respect. When the testimony is provided by an admired celebrity, we are much less likely to be critical.

Tiger Woods is on the cereal box, promoting Wheaties as part of a balanced breakfast. Cher is endorsing a new line of cosmetics, and La Toya Jackson says that the Psychic Friends Network changed her life. The lead singer of R.E.M appears on a public service announcement and encourages fans to support the "Motor Voter Bill." The actor who played the bartender on Cheers is an outspoken environmentalist.
Plain Folks

By using the plain-folks technique, speakers attempt to convince their audience that they, and their ideas, are "of the people." The device is used by advertisers and politicians alike.

America's recent presidents have all been millionaires, but they have gone to great lengths to present themselves as ordinary citizens. Bill Clinton ate at McDonald's and confessed a fondness for trashy spy novels. George Bush Sr. hated broccoli, and loved to fish. Ronald Reagan was often photographed chopping wood, and Jimmy Carter presented himself as a humble peanut farmer from Georgia.

We are all familiar with candidates who campaign as political outsiders, promising to "clean out the barn" and set things straight in Washington. The political landscape is dotted with politicians who challenge a mythical "cultural elite," presumably aligning themselves with "ordinary Americans." As baby boomers approach their sixth decade, we are no longer shocked by the sight of politicians in denim who listen to rock and roll.

In all of these examples, the plain-folks device is at work.
Bandwagon

The basic theme of the Band Wagon appeal is that "everyone else is doing it, and so should you." Since few of us want to be left behind, this technique can be quite successful. However, as the IPA points out, "there is never quite as much of a rush to climb onto the Band Wagon as the propagandist tries to make us think there is."

"The propagandist hires a hall, rents radio stations, fills a great stadium, marches a million or at least a lot of men in a parade. He employs symbols, colors, music, movement, all the dramatic arts. He gets us to write letters, to send telegrams, to contribute to his cause. He appeals to the desire, common to most of us, to follow the crowd. Because he wants us to follow the crowd in masses, he directs his appeal to groups held together already by common ties, ties of nationality, religion, race, sex, vocation. Thus propagandists campaigning for or against a program will appeal to us as Catholics, Protestants, or Jews...as farmers or as school teachers; as housewives or as miners.

With the aid of all the other propaganda devices, all of the artifices of flattery are used to harness the fears and hatreds, prejudices and biases, convictions and ideals common to a group. Thus is emotion made to push and pull us as members of a group onto a Band Wagon." (Institute for Propaganda Analysis, 1938)
"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

When a propagandist warns members of her audience that disaster will result 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.
Fear …

This technique can be highly effective when wielded by a fascist demagogue, but it is typically 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 seat-belts (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).

In summary, there are four elements to a successful fear appeal:
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, and
4) audience perception that they are capable of performing the recommended behavior.
Bad Logic? Propaganda?

Logic is the process of drawing a conclusion from one or more premises. A statement of fact, by itself, is neither logical or 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. (This is called a syllogism.)

Premise 1: Hillary Clinton supports gun-control legislation.
Premise 2: All fascist regimes of the twentieth century have passed gun-control legislation.
Conclusion: Hillary Clinton is a fascist.

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 Christians believe in God.
Premise 2: All Muslims believe in God.
Conclusion: All Christians are Muslims.

This is a rather extreme example of how logic can be abused. The following pages describe others.

It should be noted that 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.
Unwarranted extrapolation

The tendency to make huge predictions about the future on the basis of a few small facts is a common logical fallacy.

As Stuart Chase points out, "it is easy to see the persuasiveness in this type of argument. By pushing one's case to the limit... one forces the opposition into a weaker position. The whole future is lined up against him. Driven to the defensive, he finds it hard to disprove something which has not yet happened.

Extrapolation is what scientists call such predictions, with the warning that they must be used with caution. A homely illustration is the driver who found three gas stations per mile along a stretch of the Montreal highway in Vermont, and concluded that there must be plenty of gas all the way to the North Pole. You chart two or three points, draw a curve through them, and extend it indefinitely." (Chase, 1952)

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.
• If the United States approves NAFTA, the giant sucking sound that we hear will be the sound of thousands of jobs and factories disappearing to Mexico.
• The introduction of communication tools such as the Internet will lead to a radical decentralization of government, greater political participation, and a rebirth of community.
Assignment

• Provide ONE modern day example of each of the following types of Propaganda (you will have 10 total):
  • Name-calling
  • Glittering generalities
  • Euphemisms
  • Transfer
  • Testimonial
  • Plain Folks
  • Bandwagon
  • Fear
  • Bad Logic
  • Unwarranted extrapolation