Propaganda & Censorship

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Def. propaganda

"Set of methods employed by an organized group that wants to bring about the active or passive participation in its actions of a mass of individuals, psychologically unified through psychological manipulations and incorporated in an organization."

(Jacques Ellul, 1973)

Propaganda versus persuasion

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Progaganda: "deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist."

Persuasion: "interactive attempt to satisfy the needs of both persuader and persuadee."

(Jowett and O'Donnell, 2011)

Propaganda versus ideology

Progaganda: intentional actions and conscious efforts to change peoples' ideas and behaviors.

Ideology: set of values, meanings and ideas that unconsciously influence the choices of producers, gatekeepers and journalists, as well as the interpretations of the viewers.

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Who propagandizes?

People from all horizons can use propaganda techniques to defend a cause that they consider noble.

Who is affected by propaganda?

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People from all horizons are affected by propaganda to varying degrees.

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How does propaganda work?

Control the flow of information

1) Becoming a source of information (creating news events, press releases, press kits, talk show apperances, books, posters, badges, slogans, advertisements, etc.).

2) Excluding undesirable sources of information by shaping media policies or imposing censorships (direct, indirect, political, moral, commercial).

3) Media concentration, centralization, globalization.

Ref. Patrick, 2013, p. 29-45

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What are the propaganda techniques?

Bandwagon and Inevitable Victory

Creating the illusion of democracy, participation and consensus (polling, surveys, marchings, crowds, mass spectacles, slogans, uniforms, etc.) and inviting people to join those on the road to victory, in order to provoke a contagion effect.

American politicians

Courtesy of EL Gringo on flickr. Used with permission. License CC-BY-NC-SA.

Reflecting the values of the audience

Appealing to the people's values, common knowledge and stereotypes or making them believe that they are threatened.

Simplification

Using generalities to describe complex phenomena while masking nuances and differences (stories, myths, parables, stereotypes, anecdotes, slogans, visuals, graphics, etc.).

Reinforcing oppositions (good/evil, rich/poor, black/white, liberal/conservative, west/east, terrorism/civilization, men/women, capitalist/communist, etc.).

Entrance of Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp

Courtesy of Chris Brown on flickr. Used with permission. License CC-BY.

Distortion

Twisting the facts in favour of the propagandist without directly lying. Embellishing or aggravating reality by showing only one aspect of it or by presenting it from a certain angle.

Semantic shifts

Replacing an expression by another to empty its meaning or emotional charge. Using euphemisms such as negative growth, market correction, re-deployment, reorganization, collateral damage, etc. or dysphemisms such as clan, insurgents, person of interest, etc.

Cognitive penetration and stickiness

Making sure that a message is noticed and retained by using attractive elements (sex, stricking symbols, humor, graphics, etc.), novelty (controversies, conspiracy theories, revelations, forbidden elements, buzzwords, trends, etc.) and by repeating it (branding, acronyms, slogan etc.).

Distancing the message from its source

Disguising propaganda as news, talk shows, educative films, documentaries, scientific reports, government leaks, blogs, etc.

Using front organizations such as university research groups or charity organizations in order to gain legitimacy.

Addressing the audience's needs

Evoking the people's corporal needs (food, sex, shelter, etc.), psychological needs (economic programs, lower taxes, better neighbourhoods, etc.) or social needs (ready-made identities, patriotism, etc.) or making them believe that they are threatened.

Personalizing

Transforming a person into a symbol to make him/her seem virtuous, praiseworthy, admirable or crazy, evil, criminal, violent, greedy, etc. (Lincoln, Hitler, Tojo, Luther King, Hussein, Bin Laden, etc.).
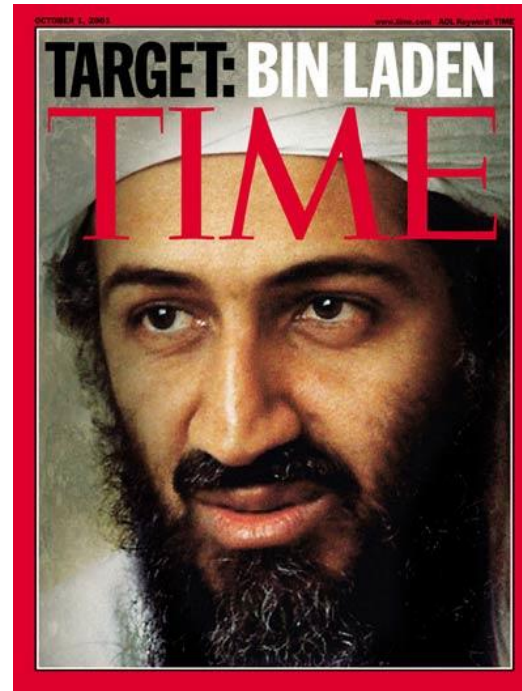
Dehumanizing

Transforming people into animals or objects (vermin, machines, monsters, vultures, pigs, etc.) to make them less likeable and devalue their life.

Appeal to authority

Quoting or showing celebrities, experts, consultants, respected public figures or prestigious institutions to support a position and gain credibility.

Showing evidences (statistics, facts, data, surveys, reports, logical arguments, scientific findings, economic indices, etc.).

Concealment

Omitting information that contradicts the propagandist's ideas, cause or regime.

Association

Forcing relations between things, ideas, people or groups, by juxtaposing several images, images and texts, images and narration, etc.

Disinformation

Introducing false information, rumors and lies.

Recuperation

Appropriating myths, cultural referents, collective fears, hopes or resentment, in order to serve the propagandist cause.

Appeal to the heartstrings

Creating emotions and touch people's heart instead of stimulating reasoning and critical thinking.

How does propaganda affect American news?

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Worthy and unworthy victims

Victims of the enemy states benefit from more sensitive media coverage than victims of the United States and its allies (use of words such as 'genocide', 'massacre', etc.).

Ref. Herman & Chomsky, 2002

Legitimate and meaningless elections

Foreign elections that are not supported by the US government are depicted as 'sham', 'rigged', 'fraudulent', 'imperfect', and elections that are supported by the US government are depicted as 'encouraging', 'a step toward democracy', 'remarkable achievement' while flaws and frauds are ignored.

Ref. Herman & Chomsky, 2002

Interchange between victim and aggressor

When the United States are at war, American media:

- highlight the noble intentions of the US government (protecting the people)
- avoid using terms such as 'aggression' to describe the US intervention
- fail to report illegal actions (chemical attacks, policy of starvation, etc.)
- avoid questioning the government right to intervene
- while demonizing the victims (focusing on US army casualties and war prisoners).

Ref. Herman & Chomsky, 2002

Tolerable and evil dictators

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American media are ignoring dictators that are instrumental to the US government, while demonizing dictators that are not useful to the US government (use of words such as 'killer', 'war criminal', 'mass murderer', 'dictator', etc.).

Ref. Herman & Chomsky, 2002

Prioritizing investors issues

When it comes to national politics, American media are limiting the debates to the terms defined by the two main political parties and excluding issues that these parties agree on (unions, large defense budget, trade agreements, use of chemical, etc.).

Ref. Herman & Chomsky, 2002

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Ignoring or demonizing the opposition

For local issues, media are ignoring polls that show opposition to issues on which major investors in political parties agree. Media coverage is often hostile to protesters (use of words such as 'all-purpose agitators', 'troublemakers'), while downplaying the police provocation and violence (use of chemical weapons and rubber bullets).

Ref. Herman & Chomsky, 2002

Why mass media propagandize?

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Mass media propagandize on behalf of the social interests that control and finance them.

Ref. Herman & Chomsky, 2002

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Are all propaganda messages ethically wrong?

Does Internet favor individual agency more than propaganda and ideologies?

References

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Roland, Jon. 1998. "Propaganda Technique". *Constitution Society*. Website: http://www.constitution.org/col/propaganda_army.htm.

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Additional Resources

Examples of propaganda:

- Triumph of the Will

- Animated Soviet Propaganda

- Why We Fight

- The Eternal Jew

- L'oeil de Vichy

CMS.701 / CMS.901 Current Debates in Media
Spring 2015