

# Propaganda throughout history

Sociology, Communication



Propaganda has existed as a method of communication for a long time. It was originally a neutral term used to describe the dissemination of information in favor of any given cause. The redefinition implying its now negative connotation arose because of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany's admitted use of propaganda favoring communism and fascism respectively, in all forms of their public expression. Propaganda under this connotation still exists, however its evolution over the centuries has ensured its survival in the most unassuming ways.

This paper will highlight the definitions of propaganda, the uses of propaganda in history through religion, Nazi Germany and the Cold War; its reappearance after the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the 1995 Canadian referendum, evolution into advertising and how society today has become almost indifferent to it. What is Propaganda? Traditional propaganda is defined as a systematic manipulation of public opinion, generally through the use of symbols, monuments, speeches and publications.

Today's "modern" propaganda is distinguished from other forms of communication in that it is consciously and deliberately used to influence group attitudes; with all other communication functions being secondary. Therefore, almost any attempt to sway public opinion, including lobbying, commercial advertising and even missionary work, can be broadly interpreted as propaganda. However propaganda, more often than not, is associated with political situations referring to efforts by governments and political groups.

Propaganda itself can be categorized as White, Gray, or Black, depending on the accuracy of information and where source is credited – if it's credited at

all! White propaganda is defined as coming from a source that is identified correctly and contains information that tends to be accurate such as national pride messages. A message considered Black propaganda when the source is concealed or credited to a false authority, and spreads lies, fabrications and deceptions. Gray propaganda falls somewhere between these two forms as the source may or may not be correctly identified, and the accuracy of the information is uncertain.

Ultimately though, the success or failure of any propaganda depends on the receiver's willingness to accept the credibility of the source and the content of the message. Religious Propaganda The first use of propaganda is credited to the Catholic Church with their creation of sainthood; which was created to influence opinions and beliefs on religious issues. From the fourth century onwards, the church launched an immense propaganda campaign aimed at communicating the character, powers and importance of saints as a method of keeping the loyalty of their existing followers and as a tactic to gain new ones.

The Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of Faith was responsible for the campaign in spreading this message. Through their monasteries, the church was able to target emperors, kings and upper noblemen with the message of the saints. Once the church had the buy-in of rulers, the reputations of these saints were given more validity to the general population and their shrines became protected as sacred places. It should be noted that during this period very few people outside the church were literate thereby making authentication of any information difficult.

In order to spread the message of the saints, the church used relied on oral messaging and stories told through images such as in the stained glass seen today in cathedrals. For the average person, the church carried absolute authority as it was considered to be the leading source of knowledge. With this power, the church was easily able to bring their saints to life, so to speak. While the propaganda of saints was originally intended as a missionary tool, their resulting successes strengthen a variety of religious objectives.

Saints helped reestablish the monastic movement after a period of crisis by generating funds to complete cathedrals and gave the church a major tool for controlling popular religious trends. They also fueled the enthusiasm for the Spanish crusade; which is an excellent example of one of the church's most immediate successful propagandistic campaign with its mission of bringing all together in Christendom. Spurred on by the words of Pope Urban II that Muslims had conquered Jerusalem, the Crusader's mission was to recapture the 'Holy Land' and they dedicated their lives to this in return for the promise of redemption.

Nazi Germany During the 20th century, the arrival of radio and television enabled propagandists to reach more people than before. In addition to the development of these modern medias, warfare and political movements had also contributed to the growing importance of propaganda in the 20th century. Of all the propaganda artists throughout history, no one is better known than Adolf Hitler. During his rein in Nazi Germany, he saturated schools, government and every part of German's daily lives with propaganda.

His keen and sinister insight into mass psychology contributed to Nazi Germany being noted for its psychologically powerful propaganda – much of which was centered on the Jews who were made the scapegoats for Germany's economic woes. Hitler was as a gifted speaker who, as history shows, captivated the masses with his beating of the podium and growling, emotional speeches. Authentic as they may have seemed, these speeches were full of propaganda and rhetoric which he used to appeal to the economic need of the lower and middle classes, while sounding resonant chords of nationalism, anti-Semitism and anti-communism.

Threatened by hyperinflation, political chaos and a possible Communist takeover, Hitler, offered Germans scapegoats and solutions. To the economically depressed he promised to despoil “Jew financiers” and to workers he promised security. He gained the financial support of bankers and industrialists with his hostility towards Communism and promises to control trade unionism. Shortly after coming to power, Hitler's Third Reich established the Ministry of Propaganda, whose aim was to ensure the Nazi message was successfully communicated through art, music, theater, films, books, radio, educational materials and the media.

Films in particular played an important role in disseminating racial Anti-Semitism, portraying Jews as “subhuman” creatures infiltrating an Aryan society. The Ministry successfully censored and/or eliminated any viewpoint it felt posed a threat to Nazi beliefs or to the regime leaving only the propagandistic message available to the masses. The Cold War Nazi Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union forced the United States, the United

Kingdom and the Soviet Union into wartime cooperation despite their past tensions.

However, from the start, the alliance between the world's leading economic power, the world's largest colonial empire and the world's first Communist state was marked by mutual distrust and ideological tension. The Cold War began shortly after the end of World War II over disagreements on how postwar Europe should be rebuilt. While neither side ever “officially” fought the other, as the consequences would be too appalling with the Soviet Union’s Red Army and the Americans possession of the A-bomb, they did wage an incredible war of propaganda.

Soviet propaganda focused mainly on overcoming such hardships as exploitation of the working class, racial discrimination and discrimination against women. Their propaganda described the Soviet society as a modern, progressive culture. While they relied upon a variety of resources for propaganda, their posters were the Soviet’s most influential pieces. These posters focused upon the achievements of Russian communists politically, economically and technologically.

Domestically, these posters aimed at increasing government support and building patriotism. Many posters focused upon anti-American sentiments. The American capitalist was portrayed as a large, plump old man dressed in a tuxedo and hat. Typical actions of the capitalist in Soviet posters included withholding grain from hungry peasants or running over children with his shiny car. These posters attacked the benefits of the wealth that result from capitalism, while other posters showed the effects of capitalism on poverty.

In 1942 the United States created the Office of War Information (OWI), which was responsible for disseminating anti-communist propaganda in order to convince American's that the US was justified in this new battle. The anti-communist propaganda made American's fearful and strengthened the movement to support the United States' opposition to communist states. This propaganda saturated books, pamphlets, comics, films, and radio for nearly 30 years during the Cold War. Hollywood films became a common feature to further propagandize the communist platform with titles such as *Apocalypse Now*, *Red Dawn* and *Dr. Strangelove* .

Among its wide-ranging responsibilities, OWI reviewed and approved the design and content of government posters and established the Voice of America, as a method of transmitting its messages to the masses. Voice of America still remains the official government broadcasting service of the United States today. Funded by the US government, it defines itself as an international broadcasting service boasting 1, 000 hours of news, information, educational, and cultural programming weekly to a worldwide audience of approximately 115 million people". Propaganda in North America Today 9/11 and the ' War onTerrorism'

In the wake of 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centers in 2001, then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld quickly created a modern version of the OWI, with the Office of Strategic Influence (OSI) to disseminate war information. In the critical " planning stages" leading up to an invasion of Iraq, the twisting of public opinion in the US, and around the world, was an integral part of their war agenda. Acts of war were proclaimed " humanitarian interventions" geared towards " regime change" and " the

restoration of democracy". Military occupation and the killing of civilians are presented as " peace-keeping".

In news reports on actual, possible or future terrorist attacks, the propaganda campaign exhibited a consistent pattern referring to ' reliable sources' or a ' growing body of evidence'; and included key phrases such as terrorist groups involved had ' ties to Bin Laden' or Al Qaeda". News reports unwittingly confirmed the America's need to initiate " pre-emptive actions directed against these various terrorist organizations and/or the foreign governments that harbour the terrorists". These types of news reports were also used to justify ethnic profiling and mass arrests of presumed terrorists.

As it had done during the Cold War, the government also influenced the scope and direction of many Hollywood productions as immediately following 9/11. One third of Hollywood productions were war movies that reinforced the message of patriotism such as Black Hawk Down and Spy Game. In their book Propaganda and Persuasion , authors Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell suggest that overtly patriotic national celebrations are forms white propaganda. Celebrations such as the Fourth of July or Canada Day are designed to increase patriotism by bolstering national pride and glorifying ' dying for one's country'.

In 1991, President Bush went to watch one of the US' oldest annual Independence Day celebrations held in Missouri. Wearing an American flag in his pocket, he praised American troops who fought in the Persian Gulf saying " the war had made everyone in the country proud to say ' I am an American and I love my country'. " These types of propagandistic celebrations are crucial in times of war, drawing on the emotions of its countrymen in order



for the government to gain support for its actions. My Canada Includes Quebec In 1995, Canadians faced the possibility of the province of Quebec's separation from Canada.

Since the referendum battle was over the hypothetical situation with complex facts and nationalist emotions, the most important fight of the referendum was for the minds and spirits of the Quebec voters. Spearheaded by the separatist Bloc Quebecois Party, Quebec residents were fed a continuous stream of negative images of federalism into their collective psyche. The majority of the propaganda during the referendum came from the Bloc Quebecois (separatists) and Party Quebecois (nationalists) who used a combination of party ideas, facts and images to spread the idea that rest of Canada would never recognize Quebec's distinctiveness.

To that end, Nationalists launched the slogan that " a vote for the Non is a vote for the status quo". However, the majority of their propagandistic campaign revolved around discrediting federalism as harming Quebec to help to reinforce their core nationalist support; presenting their images of a peaceful, easy separation and the inevitability of Quebec becoming a " normal" nation-state. On the flip side, Federalists launched their own campaign to counter the pro-separatist and nationalist propagandistic messaging.

Federalists employed facts of the high cost of separation and the dangers of instability and ethnic conflict, as an attempt to force the Nationalists into defending the need of an independent state. Today most of the propaganda in the North America comes from governments and ' various private entities'. In this respect, propaganda is an ambiguous term that can often

meaning the same as advertising. Radio, newspaper, posters, books, and anything else the government might send out to the widespread public can be considered, by definition, propaganda. Advertising as Propaganda

In the early 20th century, the founders of the growing public relations industry originally used the term propaganda to describe their activities. This usage died out around the time of World War II, as the industry started to avoid the word, given the negative connotation it had acquired. Whatever you call it, advertising is a form of propaganda as it is ever-present and the message it carries is a result of ulterior motives by people who want to make money and maintain the status quo. Alongside the news, advertising is a tool that shapes public opinion.

Everywhere you look there is some form of advertising, whether you're driving a car or taking public transit, there is advertising. Billboards, posters, newspapers, magazines – everywhere we turn we are exposed to some form of advertising pushing a product, concept or belief on to us. Advertising is a fiercely competitive industry with success won not necessarily by the best product, but rather with the best advertising. As advertising relies on the amount of coverage or penetration, coupled with the quality of the delivery, it is easy to see how it compares to propaganda.

If a tag or a brand logo is reproduced enough to become recognizable by a large section of the community, it becomes part of the social landscape and instantly embedded into the mind. Advertising has evolved from its beginnings as a text-based medium highlighting a product's merits into the marketing feelings, lifestyle and fantasy with advertising campaigns such as

Calvin Klein's Obsession, which feature highly sexualized images that convey beauty and virility through photographs of almost nude models.

Consumers have become oblivious to the propagandistic qualities of advertising but are not immune to its effects. Look at the successful marketing of Energizer batteries with its creation of its Energizer Bunny®. Since 1989, Energizer has featured its bunny in their commercials, hammering the simple message 'it keeps going and going...' into the minds of consumers. Energizer is an excellent example of a company that has successfully ensured consumers understand their product message by employing the techniques of propaganda.

When watching a commercial for Energizer, consumers now immediately associate the infamous pink bunny to the Energizer product. For its success, the Energizer Bunny® campaign was recognized as one of the Top Five Advertising Icons of the 20th Century, and has received multiple television advertising awards. Conclusion Throughout history, propaganda has been used and misused to suit the needs of governments during times of crisis, such as war and political instability, and to garner support for private causes such as Christianity in the fourth century.

With increased literacy and information readily available to support and/or refute arguments, society is more alert to messages of government/political propaganda and what is strictly information dissemination than its forefathers. However, under the guise of advertising, propaganda continues to be an acceptable tool of persuasion – a multi-billion dollar industry in fact! Consumers are critical when analyzing information presented by governing bodies, yet readily accept the messages/promises conveyed in advertising.

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Would society be as indifferent to advertising if it were still called propaganda?

The formation of watchdog groups, such as Adbusters, call attention of the propagandistic messages by questioning facts and parodying advertising campaigns with unpleasant product realities. With their proclaimed goal to “[get] folks to get mad about corporate disinformation ”, Adbusters’ has created campaigns such as TV Turnoff Week, a method of mass protest against the inundation of commercial messages. While such watchdog groups call attention to advertising’s one-sided, self-serving message, it is up to consumers to pay attention to product messaging and its effects on our culture.