

How successful was  
nazi propaganda from  
1933 to 1939?



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

How successful was Nazi propaganda from 1933 to 1939? How is Success of Propaganda Gauged? The Nazi propaganda machine is at times impressive, at times unusual, at times terrifying. "... Everything is propaganda." The Nazis understood human psychology.

It was Goebbels' simple realisation that, for instance in cinematic propaganda, there was a need for the viewer to be entertained. Otherwise, there would be no interest in watching at all. This is simply a single instance of the successfulness of Nazi propaganda. Goebbels realised this and corrected it.

How can success be gauged? Maybe by considering the theories and practices of propaganda such as with the cinema - but how can one know how much propaganda was reaching people? - Therefore how successful it was? There was no market research, very few non-Gestapo conducted opinion polls to look at... and even if there were many others, the information would not be accurate - the opinions affected. Who would, in Nazi Germany 1933-39, tell a street researcher that they believed "Triumph of the Will" to be contrived and blatantly self-indulgent propaganda? If there had been polls conducted, the results would have shown exactly what Goebbels and Hitler wanted people to think - this was achieved by making sure that only certain things were safe to think - and more importantly safe to say. Goebbels, in his 1934 New Year speech: "Only he who thinks he is lost is lost.

" ... The penalty for telling Hitler jokes was death.

Alternatively, one could look at how much opposition (i. e. resistance) there was to the Nazi regime - and to Nazi propaganda. Was there absolute opposition? There really was not very much - there was in some circles a feeling of acquiescence to the Nazi regime, neutral emotion towards the treatment of Jews for instance.

This is a very general, and lies in broad public opinion, from interviews made after the fall of the Nazis... between 1933 and 45 the people of Germany, no matter how indifferent would know better than to not appear reasonably enthusiastic about Hitler. The last, and most useful means of gauging success of propaganda is to find the aims - and simply investigate the successfulness of their execution. But just because it achieved its aims, was it necessarily successful, per se? This study will find out if these aims were achieved - and whether this meant that Nazi propaganda was truly successful.

How Successful was Nazi Propaganda 1933-39? The relevance of how successful propaganda was at reaching people is that: it would be largely true to say - if it had reached people, if it had influenced peoples thought in a way beneficial to the rise of the Nazi party, therefore it had achieved a primary aim. The human front of Nazi propaganda was Dr. Joseph Goebbels. In many respects, the German population saw propaganda through him.

The maintenance of a perfect, profound, and above all credible image was essential to the success of propaganda... however, this varied: The historian Richard Grunberger said in ' A Social History of the Third Reich': " Once a

leader had established himself in popular affection, disreputable revelations about his way of life..

. enhanced rather than undermined his standing. " However he goes on to make the reference to " newsreels featuring Goebbels in a grand seigniorial setting had to be withdrawn" - audience reactions were hostile. It is a demonstration of the Nazi desire for credibility and close relation with the desires of the people, that the newsreel was withdrawn. Goebbels was not willing to make willing mistakes, a man in determined to achieve his aims. There were many means by which he went about this.

.. the tools of the propoganda machine were diverse and total. The common thought was that propoganda " should infiltrate every aspect of people's lives. " To do this, Goebbels needed to affect all forms of the media.

To have total propoganda, means there is nothing it to allow people to know any different... Propoganda would be all they know.

Whether or not this was true in practice is a different matter. The cinema was Goebbels' grandest asset to the propoganda machine... he made good use of it. From images of the colossal gatherings, marches - ' grand', ' powerful' Germany - to newsreels of Hitler's addresses.

.. although News, not strictly accurate news, but better for morale. 1933 onwards did not hail an instant and a total change in the look of the films produced if.

Richard Grunberger, " A Social History of the Third Reich": " Had a cinema-going a Rip Van Winkel dozed off in the Depression and awoken in the Third  
<https://assignbuster.com/how-successful-was-nazi-propoganda-from-1933-to-1939/>

Reich he would have found the screen filled with the self same images. " The pro-Hitler press baron Hugenberg controlled the UFA, Germany's largest film company. This allowed for the agreement of ideas, and a stronger Nazi influence on what became celluloid. For differing reasons, one fact was clear - cinema attendance figures were increasing - more people were seeing the Nazi influenced films. In 1933 the number of moviegoers was 250 million, in 1942 was 1, 000 million.

This was a lot to do with Goebbels addressing of the divide between propaganda and entertainment. This is a key factor to the success of cinema as a medium. Films such as Leni Riefenstahl's ' Triumph of the Will' and - though a beautiful showcase of Nazi might at the Nuremberg party rally - was in many respects, in presentation - too extreme. A documentary, but one so very clearly designed to work for the promotion of the Nazi party. In the same way, the expense of Colour film was employed to further enhance the purely visual might of the Nazis on screen. Visually impressive, but in some cases suffering from a lack of substance.

This did not worry Goebbels as much as the greatest possible threat to his cinematographic propaganda: lack of credibility. " Ohm Kruger" was a clear and prominent anti-British epic, showing generation's clashing - father against son, and British soldiers and raping the one of the principal character's wife. This theme occurred several times in Nazi cinema, primarily as a means of downplaying unfavourable characters. In " Jud Suss", the main Jewish figure (an archetypal styled cliché) is the instigator of rape and torture...

Self-promotion was also rife, with Goebbels family portrayed on screen as the perfect, happy Nazi family. The purpose - establish credibility. The extreme scenes of rape and torture were potentially at risk of their own extremity..

. they could not be effective if people did not believe them. The cinema allowed people to see the might of Germany...

but far from via raw imagery - the influence of propagandists was initially clear, however became more transparent and therefore more effective: Cinema attendance figures quadrupled. Propaganda, however slight or extreme, was being seen. The object of Riefenstahl's 'Triumph of the Will' was also another facet of propaganda. Dr. Robin Lenman: "Riefenstahl claimed later that she..

. had just tried to film the rally 'as it was'. However, the speech extracts that we hear... underline those messages [chaotic radicalism would be crushed, Party unity was rock solid, and Hitler had not sold out to Germany's conservative elites] so clearly that she was either lying or had strong political guidance during the editing.

"The marches, the rallies. They were simply a demonstration of the splendour and might of the Third Reich. The cameras made sure everybody saw it, the microphones and make sure they heard it. Thousands upon thousands of Germans gathered at the events to see Hitler's addresses - the great orator in the hub of the incredible scene. It was all, understandably fantastic for morale and patriotism: of course this was the singular purpose, and it was massively effective in doing so. Quoted in Hitler's Germany 1933-  
<https://assignbuster.com/how-successful-was-nazi-propaganda-from-1933-to-1939/>

39 (Author and Publisher unknown), the ' observation of a liberal whose general outlook was anti-nazi': " A sea of flags in all the streets, we too couldn't opt out.

.. mpressive, spellbinding..

. how marvellously it's been staged by that master producer Goebbels. " One of the purposes of this propaganda was, in spite of Hitler's promises of peace...

psychological preparation for war was required; it was towards 1939 becoming increasingly likely that conflict would occur. Covers such as this for the August 1933 issue of Die Brennessel show the early instigation of mental preparation. Actual conflict was not to occur for six years later. Probably Goebbels' greatest propaganda asset was the ' Volksempfanger' - the people's receiver. Adolf Hitler: " Without a motor-cars, sound films and wireless, no victory of National Socialism.

" In 1933 4. 5 million German households had broadcast access, they were in Nazi earshot so to speak. In 1940 to 16 million households were listening. This was to do with the availability of inexpensive radios: the VE (Volksempfanger) 3. 31, selling at 76 Marks was available after the Nazi takeover. At 35 Marks, the DKE (Deutscher Kleinempfanger), later released was " the cheapest radio set in the world" (Grunberger).

Propaganda transmitted by radio became the most effective of all because the most people could be yet influenced by it. A factor of the success of Radio was its personal nature. While the cinema was experienced with

others, and of course of the party rallies were – radio had the enigmatic ability for the Nazi party talk to people in their own homes...

and to do this en masse, to boot. Political broadcasts were often made during working hours, where radio facilities allowed, while work was suspended, for the workers to hear the Fuhrer. Radio was far from being exclusively propaganda – yes, it was successful in doing so to a certain extent...

Hans Fritsche, radio commentator: “ Radio must reach all or it will reach none. ” ... But Goebbels again realised the essential need for entertainment – a proper balance would make it massively effective: the propaganda influenced people, the entertainment made sure people continued listening.

Between 1932-7, the proportion of all broadcast time set aside for music increased by almost a 5th of all radio time from 59 per cent to 69 per cent. In his speech ‘ The Radio as the Eighth Great Power’: “ It is in fact a modern revolution, and it has used the most modern methods to win and use power. It therefore does not need saying that the government resulting from this revolution cannot ignore the radio and its possibilities. To the contrary, it is resolved to use them to the fullest extent in the work of national construction that is before us, and in ensuring that this revolution can stand the test of history. ” Goebbels was listening to the people who were listening to him. The public addresses were broadcast in lavish detail, microphones even capturing the sound of the goose-stepping brown shirts (! It was one propaganda medium presented through another.



Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton in *Last Night a DJ Saved my Life: The History of the Disc Jockey*: " Radio is a unique broadcast medium. It has the power to reach millions and yet it has the intimacy to make them each feel they are the most important person listening. " Perhaps the personal nature of Hitler's speeches and speaking being broadcast via radio has something to do with the closeness people felt to ' their Fuhrer', and the establishment of their ' Fuhrer cult'... s Ian Kershaw said: " The more extreme form of tasteless adulation of the ' God-sent Leader.

" This was a by-product of the propaganda successfully broadcast via radio: the medium was so successful that the originally unintentional sense of intimacy, both what Hitler and the Nazis were saying to the people, and how it was being said led to further trust - essential if a leader plans to take the country to war, and so shake its human foundations - they must have complete support of the people. Goebbels exploited this, so that Hitler benefited from it. The press, although available as a means of presenting information warped in truth by the Nazi party - or bent, or in more extreme cases broken, was not as useful a tool for propaganda as, for instance, radio was. The primary reason for this was that there were no major international newspapers - a victim of the widespread geography of the country..

. mass circulation overnight was simply impossible. What there was, however, were many varied regional newspapers, 4700 dailies before the Nazi takeover. Yet Goebbels still held sway over them: " The reader should get the impression that the writer is in reality a speaker standing beside him. " Thus the new stories can be more effectively received.

Truthful or not. " The Press directives were staggeringly comprehensive; headlines like a ' Commander-in-Chief of the Navy receives the Fuhrer' were declared inadmissible for the reason that a subordinate could not receive his Supreme Commander. In this way, and similar in all German papers, the successfulness of the image of Hitler, the ' Hitler Myth' Goebbels had strived so hard to create was not tarnished. There were guidelines set (and continually updated) by the Propaganda Ministry to direct journalists to ' appropriate' news stories to cover, and to come to call over mistakes and unfavourable judgement over other people. Because of the never-ending work for Hitler Goebbels and his peers instigated, the Fuhrer was never in question.

This was not true... What opposition was there to propaganda? - Where was it unsuccessful? ' Opposition' is a little too extreme a word to describe the results of propaganda failure.

Even the term ' failure' is in most cases too extreme - ' less successful' would be more appropriate. Either way, the result was more one of passive resistance in extreme cases. What however was far more common, and potentially the greatest threat to Hitler and Goebbels - acquiescence. What can only be discovered from interviews conducted after 1945 is, in some but of course not all, an indifference to Hitler and his ideals. Not opposition of any kind - just not active involvement, mentally or physically. It was on these people Goebbels' propaganda machine had failed.

The problem lies in a fundamental awareness of the influences of Third Reich propaganda - because of its own extremity - these people questioned its

credibility and therefore began to question whether it was a means of helping the people, or for helping itself. The Hitler Youth is a form of propaganda. It allowed Hitler to infiltrate every aspect of young people's lives - to always be there - and people tend not to question things that have been a part of their lives for most of their lives. However this was not, as History relates, necessarily the case under Hitler and Goebbels.

It was the fun of activities and sports, social activities, that held the true appeal of the Hitler Youth to the young - not the military practices and exercises there were so when unendingly drilled into them. An ex-Hitler Youth member: " Every order I was given contained a threat. " (Quoted in ' Life In The Third Reich', R. Bessel) This influence formed the seeds of resistance that drove the young Germans away from the Hitler Youth..

. away from Hitler. The Edelweiss pirates, Roving Dudes et al, towards the end of the Thirties were being formed as an alternative to the Hitler Youth. They would go in gangs, sometimes into the countryside - to socialise, sing, hike..

. and attack passing Hitler Youth patrols. Graffiti such as a " Down with Hitler" and the Edelweiss Pirate's slogan " Eternal War on the Hitler Youth" was created. The audacity of these young people's actions, in the face of severe punishments belies their commitment to resisting the system that raised them and the system that tried to influence them.

When Youth gang ringleaders were caught they could be hanged. Many were. It was an embarrassing blow for Hitler, for the children of the Third

Reich, not of Weimar, to rebel so publicly in the face of the system that raised them. Hence the punishments were severe.

No mercy could be afforded. The primary problem facing the Nazi propaganda machine was the tightness of its grip - it's all-powerful influence gripping a nation so totally - that many of the inhabitants became alienated. This presented a vicious circle to Goebbels and Hitler, the need to appear powerful in order to set an example to other potential rebels - but also to uphold the image of the 'caring leader' that Goebbels had created within the 'Hitler Myth'. The balance between the two aspects was not always centred.

To a certain extent the reasons for youth uprising lie partly in the idea, romantically, of rebellion. In the overwhelming face of the might of the Third Reich, rebellion would have been a counter reaction - against the feeling of helplessness or insignificance in the crowds of the marches, should the seemingly statutory aspect of patriotism not be the first emotion in their minds. There must have been an element of truth in the idea that not doing what they were told, when it was someone as mighty as Hitler telling them what, was in some way exciting. The simple nature of people's minds was far from the only reason that propaganda was not entirely effective in some circles.

There were many reasons for Goebbels failing to deliver an effective message, and the key issue was lack of credibility. There were various issues that contributed to propaganda discrediting the Nazis, however not necessarily discrediting Hitler: R. Bessel (Life In The Third Reich): " While the party lost in credibility, Hitler's star rose thanks to the ceaseless propaganda

campaigns of Goebbels. One need only look to the 1936 Reichstag elections.

B. Engelmann, In Hitler's Germany for a fine example of this: " [Goebbels:] "

Ninety-nine per cent of all Germans have voted for Adolf Hitler and the

NSDAP! " No one in Germany was surprised.

Everyone had felt the pressure; everyone knew about the harassment,

manipulation, and falsification at the police stations. An entire nation had

bowed to a system of terror. " This voting was performed after "

unprecedented propoganda efforts" (Engelmann). Issues such as these call

into question whether it was important whether or not people found

propoganda credible or not. Was it propoganda that convinced them to vote

NSDAP - or the terror? " Anyone who does not vote for Hitler is a traitor to

the Volk! " (Quoted in Engelmann) It brings forth the issue that truly at the

heart of the matter - in a good number of cases it didn't matter whether

people truly believed in Hitler or simply believed Hitler. The reason for his

success lay in the power that the people who did wholeheartedly believe in

the Fuhrer held in their numbers, their persuasion.

Quoted in Hitler's Germany 1933-39 (Author and Publisher unknown): "... We

too couldn't opt out...

" The desire to simply, on a basic and relatively passive manner, conform or "

go along' with a man who seemed to genuinely want to see Germany as one

of the great superpowers: was great enough. This view lay within the area of

acquiescent Nazi ' tolerators', over whom propoganda could not exactly be

defined as ' profoundly successful', but was successful enough to the extent

that people did not in any way oppose the regime. This was, in many circles,

the most propaganda (whether propaganda itself be the influencing factor, or other people's enthusiasm) that Goebbels needed to employ to help the Nazis expand towards 1939. They needed their vote. Again, like the Hitler Youth there were areas where the Nazi parties ideology, promoted via propaganda, was not accepted. A statement from the Confessional Church, June 1934: " We reject the false doctrine that the state, over and above its special charge, should become the single and totalitarian order of human life, thus fulfilling the church's mission as well.

(From The German Resistance to Hitler, edited by H. Graml, M. Mommsen et al, quoted in Hitler and Germany by William Simpson. ) In this instance, the over publication of the extent of control that Hitler and Nazis aspired to achieve led to this opposition: if Nazi aims were not made entirely clear, this public opposition would not have occurred for the rest of the German public to hear and consider joining in support: they would simply not know what the Nazis were planning to do. Although an interesting idea to consider, the problem was that in order to attain all the aims they set out to achieve (outlined in Kershaw's diagram), the Nazis needed total public cooperation: for it was the public they were trying to affect, to do so they would need to show their entire radical nature, including the extent of their desired control, to appeal to victims of ' tired Weimar ideology'.

The fact that their radical nature upset some was an acceptable margin compared to the success it generated for the Nazis and moreover for Hitler. But it was possible to oppose the Nazi regime and win. The opposition felt toward the euthanasia programme, spearheaded by Graf Clemens August von Galen, for instance. The opposition, and von Galen in particular, was so  
<https://assignbuster.com/how-successful-was-nazi-propaganda-from-1933-to-1939/>

publicly supported that Goebbels advised against his arrest. Goebbels knew better than to needlessly escalate a dangerous issue for the Nazis into something lethal.

Nazi support was essential. The euthanasia programme was dropped. These theories applied similarly to Nazi propoganda, though not to the extent of the programme being dropped altogether of course. Trade-offs were made, and individual pieces of propoganda were dropped if they proved to be in any way detrimental to the cause. Even to the core of the creation of the ' Reich Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda' in 1933, Goebbels at the helm brought its first foray into ' transparency of propoganda' (therefore effectiveness) - Goebbels tried to have the word ' propoganda' removed from the title for obvious reasons. From the very core into every pore of German life: propoganda spoke.

To Conclude...Be it partly a ' Hitler Myth', it cannot be disputed that the propoganda Goebbels worked for the Nazi party was largely successful. The radical nature of the Nazi party is both what made it so dangerous for a non-Aryan to live in Germany, and so appealing to so many to be a part of: So dangerous, because it was so successful - and so successful because of propoganda.

The effective use of the technology that was at Goebbels' fingertips allowed for the free transmission of single ideas, from a single voice - into every home, every mind, every Germans every other thought. Goebbels used any effective medium he could employ efficiently, and never for the simple sake of it: " Propaganda is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. " ..

. Should a new idea be badly received it would be withdrawn before it could be, in any way or any further, detrimental to the successful expansion of the Nazi party. Particularly between 1933-39, Propaganda was used to its greatest effect to affect every German person in at least some small way. Propaganda helped the rising Nazi Party earn a stronger foothold in the consciousness of people's thoughts - earn a vote - earn support. Preparation for war, a need to prove Germany's preparedness in terms of the psychological gearing for conflict towards 1939, or the further promotion of this, via the demonstration of the physical preparedness - armament.

The marches were a proud Nazi display of the might of the army, the cameras seeing only what Goebbels deemed suitable. The allowing for captive audiences to hear the Fuhrer as if he were standing beside him, via newspaper and radio, what needed to be said - was said, but most importantly, was heard. Goebbels' propaganda was successful in rooting Hitler and his ideals for the advancement of the Nazi party (outlined in aims) into the soul of every person who sought change for the greater good of the 'fatherland'. When it did this, it set the scene to begin realising its individual goals.

... As for the overall goal? Without Goebbels there was no Hitler.