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**PROPAGANDA AND POLITICAL PERSUASION
 - CORNERSTONES OF MODERN POLITICAL
 COMMUNICATION**

Abstract

In the aftermath of World War I, the science of sociology started investigating propaganda, focusing its research on persuasion and the effects it has on the public in altering their views. Sometime later, as a consequence of Goebbels's propaganda machinery, it became a "dirty" word to describe how reality was manufactured by that machinery over the course of World War II. After the war, the term *military-propaganda* was replaced with the words *-communication*, *-persuasion*, and *-information*, which were intended to encompass the development of new communication technologies while softening the negative impression that the "dirty" word propaganda was giving out. Propaganda is a form of communication aiming to elicit a reaction to suit the objectives of the propaganda maker, whereas persuasion is most often presented as an interactive process in which both sides (the persuader and the persuadee) win. This is the key difference that theoreticians emphasize when defining the two models and when analyzing the causes for the auditorium altering its opinion.

Propaganda in journalism is being explored as a process to manage news, as well as distort and spin information, by highlighting only positive aspects to the public. In political science, propaganda is considered a constituent part of the ideologies that political actors espouse, while also being analyzed in the context of the influence it can have on public opinion and mass culture. Latest trends deal with the ideological grounds of propaganda and how these ideological signifiers form part of the hypotheses that media agendas put forward (Burnett, 1989: 127–137).

Keywords: Propaganda, persuasion, political communication, spin, manipulation, public relations

Propaganda can be seen as a communication technique used to manipulate the public to alter its opinions or behaviours. Propaganda makers always have a clear plan and desired objective, hence, in availing themselves of these manipulation techniques, they are completely aware of whom they are addressing and what beliefs and values does the audience they are targeting espouse. Its single objective is to defend a certain concept and help the political elite remain in power. On some occasions, a form of an open public discourse is created on a debate, aiming to mislead the public into thinking that it has more than one option to both debate on and choose from. In this process, propaganda makers always keep their objective previously set at the forefront of their attention and control the artificially created political and media reality (Bussemer, T., 2005).

History of propaganda distinguishes a minimum of three types of propaganda - military, otherwise known as public diplomacy; sociological propaganda within totalitarian regimes; and political propaganda, typical of developed democracies. Synonyms used to describe propaganda include falsehood, distortion, manipulation, brainwashing, psychological warfare and, as of late, spin or warping (Jackall, R., 1995). By singling out spin as a special technique, professional communicators attempt to separate propaganda from public relations, asserting that spin is a term alluding to manipulation, particularly when used in the political or corporate contexts, while exclusively relating it to the way in which a certain piece of news is presented to the public. Researchers focus on the symbolic and cognitive manipulation, as well as the ways in which the models of mass persuasion are scientifically backed. In the definition they have devised, Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell focus on propaganda as a process of communication. They claim that "propaganda is the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist" (Jowett and O'Donnell 1999:6). This definition describes propaganda as "conscious, deliberate and premeditated" (1999:6).

Taking into account the historical import of propaganda, researchers in the 1980s started examining the role it plays in modern states, without being condemned or criticized for doing so by the wider public. To them, the Vietnam War and the campaigns against Iraq "provided" enough material to "competently" investigate whether public opinion can be manipulated and, if true, to what extent. The advent of the internet and social media has made it easier to establish which propaganda activities affect the public discourse. On the other hand, the assortment of influences and aspects pervading makes it difficult to distinguish and separate the profession of public relations from propaganda, especially when it comes to international conflicts, media conglomerates, or, indeed, when there are more parties involved.

Many research professionals have attempted to define propaganda and deconstruct its influence. Jacques Ellul (1965, p. xv) focused on the techniques of propaganda and psychological manipulation, deeming it to be a societal phenomenon, rather than something that has been purposefully invented by humans. Ellul claimed that all biased messages existing and circulating within a society are, in fact, propaganda, regardless of the issue of whether those who put forward the messages are doing it deliberately or not. Moreover, in his writings on propaganda, he underscored its power and universality, pointing out that propaganda nullifies critical thought and reflection in a society. In doing so, he asserted that people actually need propaganda as it forms an inescapable part of modern societies, having in mind that, through propaganda, people can become partakers in elections, developments, official remembrances, festivities, etc (Jowwet, 2005). Ellul maintained that truth does not segregate propaganda from all other “moral forms,” due to the fact that, as he argued, propaganda utilizes “truths, half-truths and constrained truths.” In effect, all these definitions have gone a long way to only defining propaganda, but also identifying and distinguishing it.

Contending that propaganda is “organized persuasion” (DeVito, 1986: 239) has been widely spread, although persuasion is or should be different from propaganda. Many researchers have attempted to distinguish these terms and explain the specifics of each model separately. Sproule feels that propaganda is organized mass persuasion “representing the efforts made by large organizations or groups of people to sway the public on a certain issue by mass orchestration of alluring conclusions packaged to conceal their goal of persuasion and the lack of arguments to support those conclusions” (Sproule, 1994: 8).

PROPAGANDA AND PUBLIC OPINION

Propaganda can also be informative when certain information is shared, when something is being explained, or when certain instructions are put forward. However, in this type of informative communication, those spreading propaganda are aware that they are not doing it for common benefit, but, rather for reasons of achieving their own goals and objectives. Hence, the propaganda makers endeavour to control information and the way in which it is being developed and distributed via different communication and information strategies. Information sources, or rather propaganda makers, do not attempt to take up the role of persuaders. They typically take on a concealed identity in order to gain greater control over situations and make it easier for themselves to manipulate public opinion. Information management is carried out in various shapes and forms such as withholding information, providing information at a carefully selected time or to counterbalance certain events with a

view to influencing public perception; or creating new information by selectively placing information, as well as distorting or misrepresenting information (Ellul, J., 1973/1962).

Propaganda makers control information in the following two primary ways: (1) controlling the media as a source of information, and (2) presenting distorted information using a seemingly credible source. Exploiting journalists to infiltrate information and share it with the public is a type of distortion (Thomson, O., 1999). During the war in former Yugoslavia, Slobodan Milošević and Franjo Tuđman controlled nearly all media outlets in their home Serbia and Croatia respectively. This propaganda machinery caused huge civil demonstrations in Belgrade against the Serbian Public Broadcasting Company. Another such example is when Chinese students demonstrated at Tiananmen Square in Beijing in 1989, prompting the then Chinese government to ban news of the protests being spread to smaller cities and the other Chinese provinces. In doing so, the government prevented people in those areas from learning of the demands that the students in the great city were putting forward, while, foreign media were reporting the event only because of the fact that they had already been posted to China to report on then Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's state visit to the Far East country (Cull, N. J., Culbert, D., & Welch, D., 2003).

Propaganda is generally considered to be typically attempting to manage public opinion. Land and Sears (1964) define public opinion as a «deliberate verbal response or reaction that an individual gives when prompted by certain stimuli in a situation when certain general issues are open» (Mitchell, 1970:62). Walter Lippmann, on the other hand, deemed public opinion to be something that stems from people who are interested in public life, rather than in a certain presumed or established group of individuals (Lippmann, 1922). He believed that public opinion is as effective as people interested support or oppose the leading contributors to public life. Speier (1950) felt that public opinion exists when a certain right had been afforded to a larger and more prominent set of people outside of power. This right is heightened to the level of expectation when a government presents its decisions and elaborates it in order to allow people outside of power to think over and discuss that decision or otherwise to create democratic grounds for ensuring the success of its decision or policies (Altheide & Johnson, 1980: 7).

Mitchell asserted that there are four types of public opinion prevailing in practice - popular opinion, seen as support in general for a certain institution, regime or political system; established models ensuring group loyalty and identification; public advantage, as afforded to certain leaders; strong and consistent views pervading across the largest part of the public which are related to a certain public matter or on-going situation (Mitchell, 1970: 60–61). Mitchell described the manner

in which a propaganda maker manages public opinion as a flaming drinking glass accumulating and confronting in it different emotions focused on a specific issue which can further be inflamed by a revolt, revolution or insurgency (Mitchell, 1970: 111).

PERSUASION AS COMMUNICATION PROCESS

Persuasion represents a part of communication and is most often defined as a process used to exert influence via a persuasive message with the ultimate goal of the message recipient voluntarily accepting the message received. Victoria O'Donnell and June Kable deem persuasion to be "a complex, continuing, interactive process in which a sender and receiver are linked by symbols, verbal and nonverbal, through which the persuader attempts to influence the persuadee to adopt a change in a given attitude or behaviour because the persuadee has had his perceptions enlarged or changed" (O'Donnell and Kable, 1982: 9). The process of persuasion is an interactive one and, through it, message recipients are expected to ultimately be persuaded that their needs have been accommodated regardless of them being personal or social. This is precisely why persuasion is considered to be better than propaganda, seeing as it satisfies both parties of the persuader and the persuadee respectively. People react to persuasion for reasons of it carrying a promise that it will fulfill their wishes and needs. This entails the persuader being obliged to take care of the needs of the persuadee and acknowledge the process as a reciprocal and transaction-based one, seeing as everyone gets something from it. Politicians must address the needs of their voters if they wish to secure their votes at the next election, hoping that the voters would react, i.e. respond to their persuading.

Researchers identify three different modes of response and reaction in persuadees, i.e. those who have been the focus of persuasion. Roloff & Miller assert that formulating a response is the first reaction (Roloff & Miller, 1980:16). This process is similar to learning whereby the teacher is the persuader and the student the persuadee. They are involved in a process of persuasion through which the persuader attempts to shape the response of the student/audience teaching that student/audience how to behave and positively react to certain matters. Should the audience learn the lesson, it will react in a positive fashion to certain issues and will develop a positive attitude towards continued learning, i.e. persuasion. The second mode entails reinforcing an already elicited response/reaction. If people, i.e. audiences have already adopted a positive stance and attitude toward a certain matter, the persuader reminds the audience of their positive stance and stimulates them to become even more vocal

in expressing their views through a positive attitude. The third one is changing a response, i.e. reaction. This form of persuasion is most difficult of all to carry out owing to the fact that it forces people to change their attitude, with them being made to align to one of the viewpoints on offer or pick a side and start behaving differently while starting from a neutral perspective. In essence, people find it hard to embrace change and, hence, in the process of changing a reaction, i.e. persuasion, the persuader must attach that change to something that the persuadee already believes in. That “something” is otherwise dubbed a transmitter or presenter and is already familiar to the audience and accepted by it. Transmitters take on the form of certain beliefs, values, behaviours, activities, and collective norms.

Persuaders presume that the audience possesses all information on the matter they are persuading it about, as well as that it is aware of their arguments and of the ones being put forward by the opposing side. Although it is presumed that changes that persuaders promise will always take place in order to sustain the support of the audience, persuaders may occasionally mislead the audience into believing in something that will never happen or forms part of a hidden agenda. This process is indeed considered to be propaganda (Jowett, 2005).

Much like in persuasion, a propaganda maker will examine the needs of the target group, emphasize beliefs the propaganda maker feels are vital to those of the targeted audience, and will be well acquainted with their requirements and views. However, the process in which propaganda techniques are used will not result in two parties reaching mutual satisfaction. The two sides involved will not have their needs met, neither will the needs of the propaganda maker alone be accommodated. This is one of the chief features separating propaganda from persuasion and relating techniques.

POLITICAL PERSUASION MODEL IN CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL PROCESSES

Political persuasion is part of contemporary media surroundings and democracy. Those conducting research on political persuasion base their concepts on a number of different disciplines, using theories of communication, political science, social psychology and advertising (Encyclopedia of public relations / edited by Robert L. Heath; 2005). Political persuasion is considered one of the fundamentals of persuasion as a mode and tool in social and psychological theories due to it involving a method of convincing people to change their views and opinions within circumstances of them being afforded a “free choice.” This deliberate method of persuasion takes

into account the very fact that freedom is never absolute and citizens are able to pick only one message among the many to attach to, as well as present their personal views and behaviour as public (Johnson, K. S. - Cartee & Copeland, G. A., 2004).

Political persuasion is distinguishable from all other types of persuasion by several of its features. Firstly, the change of behaviour is a result of a direct exposure to messages that can be parts of news programs, night talk shows, political comedies and satire, daily debate shows, and other programs that are in their core either not informative at all or are not fully informative, but can have a popular culture character. Secondly, political persuasion is individual, one is being persuaded on personal grounds, whereby group influences include political parties, lobbying, protests, etc. Thirdly, political persuasion is carried out by individuals sharing a certain vested interest, but using political symbolism and placing the entire political situation within the context of certain values, civil rights, societal changes, etc. Fourthly political persuasion represents a serious and unorthodox exploration of contrasts. It entails establishing influence, affording political leaders exposure and highlighting emotional arguments, while involving both political and professional elites in the process and devising messages to be presented to individuals which are often not interested in them or are, indeed, unable to fully understand the political process. (Encyclopaedia of political communication / editors, Lynda Lee Kaid and Christina Holtz-Bacha, 2006).

Persuasion, regardless of the concept involved, has three chief objectives – to form, change, or reinforce a certain behaviour. In the political context, forming, reinforcing, or emphasizing a certain behaviour takes place utilizing the so called process of political socialization which is being reported via the media. Campaigns can, further, alter certain behaviours by particular processes to be considered a part or be organized within a campaign as central or borderline. This concept is defined as a “model of possible explanations” (Heath. R. L., edd. 2005). Heath presumes that communicators underscore certain behaviours through various psychological mechanisms including emotional emphasis, which is often used in US presidential campaigns. Nonetheless, according to Shultz, in political persuasion processes, it should be made clear that candidates are not attempting to alter the convictions of voters, but they are instead to convince voters that the positions they espouse and their own political programme are identical to those of the voters. This means that within the process of political persuasion, the profile of voters should be taken into consideration, as well as the clear and precise identification of their judgments and positions. In this case, messages should be tailored in such a manner to address each individual target audience possible and hence connect them to activities to motivate the audience and highlight their judgments (Sproule, J. M., 1997).

Political persuasion is the fundament of political communication. Controlling political language and image is carried in all possible ways with the most prominent being exerting control over the media. The reasons for this are quite simple – the media possess the power to present reality before the electorate and, hence, politicians attempt through them to acquire the consent of citizens on their constructed concept of reality, i.e. their own political reality (Schram, M., 1987). Researchers have been dealing with the processes and ways in which the public responds and reacts to messages of persuading character and have been attempting to identify the influences that new media and the advent of multimedia platforms have on the process. No matter what the character of the technical and technological development line is, political influence will forever remain related to the political world. In 1946, George Orwell wrote that political language has been “designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind.” This definition has remained to this very day as important and relevant as ever.

Even though persuasion in and of itself is not a dirty word, it is nevertheless often related to propaganda, which definitely is seen as the black sheep of political communication. Propaganda utilizes pressure, intimidation, manipulation, deception and dishonesty, whereas persuasion, i.e. political persuasion, presents people with reasons why they should change certain opinions of theirs and alter the way in which they think or behave.

On occasions, the line delineating persuasion from propaganda is very thin and, hence, in order to meet their objectives, communicators cross that line in the hope that no one will expose their unprofessionalism. In order to avoid such occurrences, professional associations of communicators and those who deal in public relations have developed ethical principles for using persuasion in their line of work. There are more than one aspects to persuasion, but the most important of them is that it is based on actual fact. Propaganda, on the other hand, deals in distorting fact while simultaneously elevating or downgrading the importance of certain elements to a story, influencing people’s emotions based on false claims and presumptions, and even using emotion-filled messages inducing fear and insecurity.

LIES AND PERSUASION

Undoubtedly, propaganda and persuasion are different to each other, while differences always have to be both pointed out and underlined, especially when the inter-relation and common denominators are explored. Even from an etymology point of view, the difference between propaganda and persuasion can clearly be

discerned. Whereas propaganda means *-to profess* in Latin, the word *-persuasion* has been derived from the meaning of advocating something, or convincing someone of something (Partridge, 2008). Propaganda is used to communicate the presumed objective of the persuader while seeking out a specific, or rather a presumed and expected reaction. Persuasion, on the other hand, is an interactive process the goal of which is to meet and accommodate the needs of both the persuader and persuadee. In persuasion, people are supposed to be motivated to become active. Propaganda differs from this in aiming to meet the expectations of propaganda makers only and, therefore, it is distinguishable both in its concept and methods used. The difference between emotion and reasonable argument is also a key reason added to distinguish between propaganda and persuasion. Persuaders appeal on the audience's emotions, but avoid manipulating with said emotions, using them instead to highlight and support their genuine facts and relevant information they employ while engaging in persuasion. According to Brown (1963), propaganda is based on emotions and values that can be distorted or shifted within a political campaign in order to persuade the audience, i.e. the voters. Furthermore, propaganda also entails telling lies, seeing as emotional appeals and messages are not necessarily entirely genuine. An important thing to remember in this respect is that the propaganda maker does not act for the benefit for his or her target audience – that is not his or her primary objective. Rather, the propaganda maker is alienated from the message recipients and quite often does not believe the messages he or she is sending out.

Another feature of propaganda is the fact that it can transmit the official message, i.e. information sent out by an official source, to a side source and in that manner attempt to present the necessary propaganda message. The public, or sections of it receiving the message does not even suspect that the message is actually coming from the propaganda maker, hence, finding it, indeed, a bit more credible. As opposed to this, persuaders clearly set their goals from the very start and clearly outline their expectations as to the changes in behaviour or views they wish to elicit from their audiences on a specific issue. Success in this respect can be seen in audiences reacting in an identical way to what the persuader has envisaged (Biddle, 1966; Hovland & Mandell, 1952). Larson (2001) feels that “persuasion is based on both “logical argument” and rational choice which are a result of debate and a discussion between a number of different parties involved. Finally, it is, indeed, true that propaganda and persuasion are used in many cases such as war, election, media, education, advertising, and the like, but the relationship between the persuader and persuadee is different in its nature and objective. To exemplify, there is no direct correlation between the one uttering or writing the propaganda messages and the audience those messages are intended for. On the other hand, persuasion takes

place face to face and this is perhaps one of the single most acknowledged and discernable differences between these two methods. Joseph Conrad has described a good persuader in the following manner: “He who wants to persuade should put his trust not in the right argument, but in the right word.” To him, “the power of sound” has always been greater than “the power of sense” (Conrad, 1990). Research professionals have concluded that people must educate themselves on the differences between these two models of communication in order to make up their minds on a certain political matter, election or, indeed, their own lives.

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