

Propaganda Explained

Definitions of Propaganda, (and one example in a court case)

revised 10/21/14

created by Dale Boozer (reprinted here by permission)

The following terms are defined to a student of the information age understand the various elements of an overall topic that is loosely called "Propaganda". While some think "propaganda" is just a government thing, it is also widely used by many other entities, such as corporations, and particularly by attorney's arguing cases before judges and specifically before juries. Anytime someone is trying to persuade one person, or a group of people, to think something or do something it could be call propaganda **if certain elements are present.**

Of course the term "spin" was recently created to define the act of taking a set of facts and distorting them (or rearranging them) to cover mistakes or shortfalls of people in public view (or even in private situations such as being late for work). But "spin" and "disinformation" are new words referring to an old, foundational, concept known as propaganda.

In the definitions below, borrowed from many sources, I have tried to craft the explanations to fit more than just a government trying to sell its people on something, or a political party trying to recruit contributors or voters. When you read these you will see the techniques are more universal.

(Source, Wikipedia, and other sources, with modification).

[Ad hominem](#)

A Latin phrase that has come to mean attacking one's opponent, as opposed to attacking their arguments. i.e. a personal attack to diffuse an argument for which you have no appropriate answer.

[Ad nauseam](#)

This argument approach uses tireless repetition of an idea. An idea, especially one made into a simple slogan. Such slogans are repeated many times, in order that hearers might begin to be take the argument as the only truth without questioning the motivation behind it.

[Appeal to authority](#)

"Appeals to authority" techniques cite prominent figures to support a position, idea, argument, or course of action. Perhaps an "expert witness", or "counselor"

[Appeal to fear](#)

Appeals to fear, and seeks to build support by instilling anxieties and panic. Ebola, for example, used to promote sealing borders from immigrants a someone unrelated topic. Piggybacking your desire (more restrictive immigration) on a fear. Or, appealing to one's natural fears to promote some product or service.

[Appeal to prejudice](#)

Using loaded or emotive terms to attach value or moral goodness to "believing the proposition" or "a position in a court case" . Used to appeal to hearer's bias. Example "This poor defendant, *right or wrong in her complaint against the*

company, has a right to compensation due to her insignificant net worth by comparison” – that is : , using income disparity to sway opinion on a case that has nothing to do with income disparity.

Bandwagon

Bandwagon and “inevitable-victory” appeals are an attempt to persuade the target that all is lost.

Inevitable victory

Invites those not already on the bandwagon to join those already on the road to certain victory. Those already (or at least partially) on the bandwagon are reassured that staying aboard is their best course of action.

—

Beautiful people

The type of propaganda that deals with famous people or depicts attractive, happy people. This makes other people think that if they buy into an idea or approve of a personal trait, they, too, will possess it. Called “reflected glory” in some circles. Or “Hero Worship” – “follow and applaud” me, they say, and “you too will be happy or successful”. Example : ads in newspaper for a home security company featured a nice looking professional football player, a defensive award winner, saying “I can defend your home”. He will do no such thing, and doesn’t even work for the company other than to sell his “selfie” to the ad agency, but it brings people to think favorable about a security company – in lieu of checking their background or track record. Reflected glory, for sure.

—

The Lie

The repeated articulation of a complex of events that justify subsequent action. The descriptions of these events have elements of truth, and the “big lie” generalizations merge and eventually supplant the jury or judge’s accurate perception of the underlying events.

Black-and-white fallacy

Presenting only two choices, with the product or idea being propagated as the better choice. For example: “You’re either with us, or against us....”

Classical conditioning

All vertebrates, including humans, respond to classical conditioning. That is, if object A is always present when object B is present, and, object B causes a strong physical reaction (e.g., disgust, pleasure) then we will, when presented with object A, when object B is **not** present, experience the same feelings.

Cognitive dissonance

People desire to be consistent. Suppose a paid pollster for a political candidate finds that a certain group of people hates his candidate for Senator. But the same group loves professional movie actor John Wayne. They hire and use actor John Wayne to endorse their candidate and thus change the target group’s minds. This is because people cannot tolerate inconsistency. They are forced to either change and dislike John Wayne, or change and like the candidate. The propaganda expert hopes it will be the latter, since they have known John

Wayne (persona) longer than the candidate, and thus probably will not turn and dislike John Wayne.

Common man

“The “plain folks” or “common man” approach attempts to convince an opponent that the propagandist’s positions reflect the common sense of the people. It is designed to win over the opponent . Propagandists use ordinary language and mannerisms (and clothe their message in face-to-face and audiovisual communications) in attempting to identify their point of view with that of the average person. With the plain folks device, the propagandist can win the confidence of persons who resent or distrust foreign sounding, intellectual speech, words, or mannerisms.” For example, an attorney could tell a jury he can’t understand the opponent’s argument, so he could forgive them if they couldn’t understand the opponent’s argument. Throwing off the opponent’s logic, however accurate, while pretending to be a “good old boy”, a “common man”, like they are.

Cult of personality

A cult of personality arises when a propaganda expert creates a **greater than life person**, an idealized and heroic public image, often through unquestioning flattery and praise. (Example: *A political operative suggesting his political candidate one who Thomas Jefferson would have endorsed – hoping the voter would not check out Jefferson’s real life history or positions*). The hero personality (Thomas Jefferson? Or Ronald Reagan) is then said to endorse the propaganda agent’s position. Another example: modern propagandists hire popular personalities (living or passed) and enhance their image some, in order to promote the idea or products. This is another form of reflected glory to make the

customer, the jury or a client feel better, while not actually advancing the client's relative position in the world. Hellene Curtis, Walt Disney, etc, all passed persons used to glorify current products.

Demonizing the enemy

Making the opponent out to be subhuman (e.g., the worst father I have ever seen) Or "unfit for duty in the role", or "worthless, or immoral", or through other false accusations.

Dehumanizing is also a term used synonymously with demonizing, the latter and usually serves as an aspect of the former.

Dictat

This technique hopes to simplify the decision making process by using images and words to tell the target audience, a judge, or a jury, exactly what actions to take, eliminating any other possible choices. Example: "Vote my client innocent" the defendant's attorney might say. Authority figures can be used to give the order, overlapping it with the Appeal to Authority technique. That is, a famous attorney stands a better chance at pulling this off than one unknown to the jury. Such an attorney might say "in all my experience, this is the worse case of injustice I have ever seen". And, usually an older attorney has a better chance at Dictat than a younger attorney. Think OJ Simpson's attorney arguing his case.

Disinformation

The creation or deletion of information from public records, or other sources for the sole purpose of making a false record of an event in the past. This technique can include outright forgery of photographs, motion pictures, broadcasts, and sound

recordings as well as printed documents. Or Disinformation could be the dissemination of false information (*relevant or not*) to throw off thinking patterns of the target. Often used in chain emails promoting a particular political party or strategy. Sometimes called 'throwing mud" at the other candidate. Mud could be irrelevant, or blatantly a lie, or it could be a distortion of the truth for political advantage or to support an opinion.

[Door-in-the-face technique](#)

Is used to increase a person's latitude of acceptance. For example, if a lawsuit is filled for \$1.0 million, and the plaintiff attorney bringing the case knows it is only worth, in the minds of a typical jury, a maximum of \$200,000, he will still file for \$1.0 million and subsequently reduces the demand to \$200,000 to make it seem like a good deal for everyone. When in fact, it might not be a good deal for the defendant. But the jury has already established a number in their mind, rather than guilty or not guilty. The plaintiff attorney has supplanted the real question with numbers.

[Euphoria](#)

The use of an event that generates euphoria or happiness, or using an appealing event to boost morale. Euphoria can be created by declaring a holiday, making luxury items available, or mounting a military parade with marching bands and patriotic messages. In a court room it could be offering the jury the weekend off if they can decide the case in one hour. And then praising them for their efficiency, even if they never looked at the facts in honest deliberation.

Fear, uncertainty and doubt

An attempt to influence a judge, jury, or another person by disseminating negative and dubious/false information designed to undermine the credibility of their opponents. Such information might not be relevant to the case, but casts a shadow over all evidence presented by their opponent. Example : To the jury the plaintiff attorney says "Who could, in their right mind, understand the fine print in the defendant's cell phone use contract?" He is planting uncertainty and doubt that the plaintiff realized what he was doing when he signed, and is thus entitled to some extra consideration.

Flag-waving

An attempt to justify an action on the grounds that doing so will make one more patriotic, or in some way benefit a country, group or idea the targeted audience supports. Example: Family values. Who could oppose that? Defending our Country. Who could oppose that? To do otherwise would let down the team. Who could oppose that?

Foot-in-the-door technique

Often used by Moonie recruiters and/or salesmen. Example: At the airport, a member of the opposite sex walks up to the victim and pins a flower or gives a small gift to the victim. The victim says thanks and now they have incurred a psychological debt to the perpetrator. The person eventually asks for a larger favor (e.g., a donation to their cause, or to buy something far more expensive). The unwritten social contract between the victim and perpetrator causes the victim to feel obligated to reciprocate by agreeing to do the larger favor – or buy the more expensive gift. In a courtroom this could take the form of giving in on some minor points and

complementing the opponent on finding some minor flaw, while then asking the opponent to agree on the major item in question.

Glittering generalities

Glittering generalities are emotionally appealing words that are applied to an idea, but present no concrete argument or analysis. This technique has also been referred to as the PT Barnum effect. An attorney, for example, defending a veteran, explaining to a jury how helpful military veterans have been to their country, and thus his client's recent bar brawl is just a blip on the radar screen, not something needing punishment. Or, a generality presented by a plaintiff's attorney such as "All businesses are basically dishonest, and this business sold a defective car to my poor client because they thought she didn't know any better, that is a violation of fair trade practices".

Half-truth

A half-truth is a deceptive statement, which may come in several forms and includes some element of truth. The statement might be partly true, or, the statement may be totally true but only part of the whole truth, or it may utilize some deceptive element, such as improper punctuation, or double meaning, especially if the intent is to deceive, evade, blame or misrepresent the truth.

Labeling

A euphemism is used when the propagandist attempts to increase the perceived quality, credibility, or credence of a particular ideal. A Dysphemism is used when the intent of the

propagandist is to discredit, diminish the perceived quality, or hurt the perceived righteousness of the target, or "Mark". By creating a "label" or "category" or "faction" of a population, it is much easier to then make an example of these larger bodies. By attaching the "Mark" to the larger body, the propaganda expert can uplift or defame the Mark without actually incurring legal-defamation. Example: "Liberal" is a dysphemism which could be used to diminish the perceived credibility of a particular "Mark". By taking a displeasing argument presented by a "Mark", the propagandist can quote that person to others, and then apply the larger label (in this case Mark is a liberal). The obvious attempt is to discredit the point or idea, by attaching it to a "category" that doesn't sit well with the target audience. It also then diminishes the quality of the Mark in the eyes of the target audience. The trick is to do it and avoid libel suits. If the propagandist uses the label on too-many perceivably credible individuals, it muddies the water. Another popular tactic of paid propaganda consultants. [Labeling](#) can be thought of as a sub-set of [Guilt by association](#), another logical fallacy.

[Latitudes of acceptance](#)

If a person's message is outside the bounds of acceptance for an individual and group, most techniques will engender psychological reactance (simply hearing the argument will make the message even less acceptable). There are two techniques for increasing the bounds of acceptance. First, one can first take a more extreme position that will make a subsequent, more moderate position, seem more acceptable. This is similar to the Door-in-the-Face technique. Alternatively, one can moderate one's own position to the edge of the latitude of acceptance and then over time slowly move to the position that was previously taken. This is often seen in political arenas. Overstepping, and then retreating to the more real position.

Love bombing

Used to recruit members to a cult or ideology by having a group of individuals cut off a person from their existing social support and replace it entirely with members of the group who deliberately bombard the person with affection in an attempt to isolate the person from their prior beliefs and value system—see Milieu control. Example : Think Patty Hurst, initially she was forced into the gang, but then didn't want to leave – she got more love there than at home. And she got a more meaningful life, in the gang. That is, in the gang she could make a contribution to even the leadership. At home, her billionaire family hardly needed her to work or make any contribution whatsoever. So the gang could easily and effectively remove Patty from her support system at home with a loving gang-like environment, even into criminal activities. Think the Moonies as another such loving organization.

Lying and deception

Lying and deception can be the basis of many propaganda techniques including Ad Hominem arguments, Big-Lie, Defamation, Door-in-the-Face, Half-truth, Name-calling or any other technique that is based on dishonesty or deception. For example, many politicians have been found to frequently stretch or break the truth.

Managing the news

According to Adolf Hitler “The most brilliant propagandist technique will yield no success unless one fundamental principle is borne in mind constantly – it must confine itself to a few points and repeat them over and over” This idea is consistent with the principle of classical conditioning as

well as the idea of "Staying on Message."

Milieu control

An attempt to control the social environment and ideas through the use of social pressure

Name-calling

Propagandists use the *name-calling technique* to incite fears and arouse prejudices in their hearers in the intent that the bad names will cause hearers to construct a negative opinion about the person or group. For example, a plaintiff attorney could tell a jury that the opponent was a "bad person" a "stranger to the kind of work he was trying to perform", a "charlatan", a person with a long record of misbehavior.

This method is intended to provoke conclusions about a matter apart from impartial examinations of facts. Name-calling is thus a substitute for rational, fact-based arguments against the an idea or belief on its own merits

Obfuscation, intentional vagueness, confusion

Generalities are deliberately vague so that the audience may supply its own interpretations. The intention is to move the audience by use of undefined phrases, without analyzing their validity or attempting to determine their reasonableness or application. The intent is to cause people to draw their own interpretations rather than simply being presented with an explicit idea. **In trying to "figure out" the propaganda, the audience forgoes judgment of the ideas or facts presented.**

Operant conditioning

Operant conditioning involves learning through imitation. For example, watching an appealing person buy products or endorse positions teaches a person to buy the product or endorse the position. Operant conditioning is the underlying principle behind the Ad Nauseam, Slogan and other repetitions in public relations campaigns.

Oversimplification

Favorable generalities are used to provide simple answers to complex social, political, economic, or military problems. **Enforced reduction of discussion by use of overly simplistic phrases or arguments** (e.g., “There is no alternative to war.”)

Quotes out of context

Selectively editing quotes to change meanings—political documentaries designed to discredit an opponent or an opposing political viewpoint often make use of this technique. In court, an attorney could ignore the context and overall document that is in question, (such as a contract), and concentrate on only a few words, out of context, to convince the jury the case is simple (and of course in their favor).

Rationalization (making excuses)

Individuals or groups may use favorable generalities to rationalize questionable acts or beliefs. Vague and pleasant phrases are often used to justify such actions or beliefs. “I was acting in the best interests of my family when I shot the

neighbor's barking dog that night ".

[Red herring](#)

Presenting data or issues that, while compelling, are irrelevant to the argument at hand, and then claiming that it validates the argument.

[Repetition](#)

This is the repeating of a certain symbol or slogan so that the audience remembers it. This could be in the form of a jingle or an image placed on nearly everything in the picture/scene. Think of flight attendants reading the same safety script on every flight, the message is supported by seat pocket photos, perhaps an overhead video, and even the flight attendant showing you in person how to buckle a seatbelt, something every person in the plane has done 1,000's of times since 1970.

[Scapegoating](#)

Assigning [blame](#) to an individual or group, thus alleviating feelings of [guilt](#) from responsible parties and/or distracting [attention](#) from the need to fix the problem for which blame is being assigned.

SLOGAN

A slogan is a brief, striking phrase that may include labeling and stereotyping. **Although slogans may be enlisted to support reasoned ideas, in practice they tend to act only as emotional appeals.** Opponents of the US's invasion and occupation of Iraq use the slogan "blood for oil" to suggest that the invasion and its human losses was done to access Iraq's oil riches. On the other hand, supporters who argued that the US should continue to fight in Iraq used the slogan "cut and run" to suggest withdrawal is cowardly or weak.

Stereotyping

This technique attempts to arouse prejudices in an audience by labeling the object of the propaganda campaign as something the target audience fears, hates, loathes, or finds undesirable. For instance, reporting on a foreign country or social group may focus on the stereotypical traits that the reader expects, even though they are far from being representative of the whole country or group; such reporting often focuses on the anecdotal. In graphic propaganda, including war posters, this might include portraying enemies with stereotyped racial features.

Straw man

A straw man argument is an informal fallacy based on misrepresentation of an opponent's position. To "attack a straw man" is to create the illusion of having refuted a proposition by substituting a superficially similar proposition (the "straw man"), and refuting it, without ever having actually refuted the original position. An attorney could say "If I owed my mother \$40, and I paid her with a note for \$40, I have paid her". His mother is a straw man for the real case, which had little to do with the example he just gave the jury.

Testimonial

Testimonials are quotations, in or out of context, **especially cited to support or reject a given policy**, action, program, or personality. The reputation or the role (expert, respected public figure, etc.) of the individual giving the statement is exploited. The testimonial places the official sanction of a respected person or authority on a propaganda message. This is done in an effort to cause the target audience to identify itself with the authority or to accept the authority's opinions and beliefs as its own.

Third party technique

Works on the principle that people are more willing to accept an argument from a seemingly independent source of information than from someone with a stake in the outcome. It is a marketing strategy commonly employed by Public Relations (PR) firms, that involves placing a premeditated message in the "mouth of the media." Third party technique can take many forms, ranging from the hiring of journalists to report the organization in a favorable light, to using scientists within the organization to present their perhaps prejudicial findings to the public. Frequently astroturf groups or front groups are used to deliver the message.

Foreign governments, particularly those that own marketable commercial products or services, often promote their interests and positions through the advertising of those goods because the target audience is not only largely unaware of the forum as vehicle for foreign messaging but also willing to receive the message while in a mental state of absorbing information from advertisements during television commercial breaks, while

reading a periodical, or while passing by billboards in public spaces. A prime example of this messaging technique is advertising campaigns to promote international travel. While advertising foreign destinations and services may stem from the typical goal of increasing revenue by drawing more tourism, some travel campaigns carry the additional or alternative intended purpose of promoting good sentiments or improving existing ones among the target audience towards a given nation or region. It is common for advertising promoting foreign countries to be produced and distributed by the tourism ministries of those countries, so these ads often carry political statements and/or depictions of the foreign government's desired international public perception. Additionally, a wide range of foreign airlines and travel-related services which advertise separately from the destinations, themselves, are owned by their respective governments; examples include, though are not limited to, the Emirates airline (Dubai), Singapore Airlines (Singapore), Qatar Airways (Qatar), China Airlines (Taiwan/Republic of China), and Air China (People's Republic of China). By depicting their destinations, airlines, and other services in a favorable and pleasant light, countries market themselves to populations abroad in a manner that could mitigate prior public impressions. See: Soft Power

A good example of this might be Putin's spending billions on an Olympic venue that will probably never be used again. Probably it was for the purpose of improving his own image with his own people (for reelection) or to promote Russia as a good place to do business. It most likely wasn't totally out of his love for competitive sports between countries.

Thought-terminating cliché

A commonly used phrase, sometimes passing as folk wisdom, used to quell cognitive dissonance.

Transfer

Also known as **association**, this is a technique that involves projecting the positive or negative qualities of one person, entity, object, or value onto another to make the second more acceptable or to discredit it. It evokes an emotional response, which stimulates the target to identify with recognized authorities. Often highly visual, this technique often utilizes symbols (e.g. [swastikas](#)) superimposed over other visual images (e.g. logos). These symbols may be used in place of words.

Selective truth

[Richard Crossman](#), the British Deputy Director of [Psychological Warfare Division](#) (PWD) for the [Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force](#) (SHAEF) during the Second World War said “In propaganda truth pays... It is a complete delusion to think of the brilliant propagandist as being a professional liar. The brilliant propagandist is the man who tells the truth, or that selection of the truth which is requisite for his purpose, and tells it in such a way that the recipient does not think he is receiving any propaganda... [...] The art of propaganda is not telling lies, **but rather selecting the truth you require and giving it out – mixed up with some truths the audience wants to hear.**”

Unstated assumption

This technique is used when the idea the propagandist wants to plant would seem less credible if explicitly stated. The concept is instead repeatedly assumed or implied.

Virtue words

These are words in the value system of the target audience that produce a positive image when attached to a person or issue. Peace, happiness, security, wise leadership, freedom, “The Truth”, etc. are virtue words. Many see religiosity as a virtue, making associations to this quality affectively beneficial. Their use is considered of the Transfer propaganda technique. Example “My client is a good Christian lady, she was taken advantage of by an unscrupulous car dealer”.

—

NOTE: While developing this list of propaganda, I was made aware of a real legal case in nearby court. This case involved a lady who was accusing a car dealer of taking advantage of her – in spite of his (the dealer’s) generous dealings with her, and her abuse of his kindnesses. She was claiming damages altogether for her personal profit. Her attorney, having no facts on his side, attempted to paint this as a case of “good vs. evil”. A Christian lady vs. and unscrupulous auto dealer.

The plaintiff attorney (I am told) started by appealing to comic renditions of how “all car dealers are dishonest”. This is an example of how many propaganda techniques can be combined, in an single approach to win a case. This one “generalization”.

“Generalization” – that is, all businesses are unscrupulous,

car dealers then in particular, was used to position the jury in a manner that they might feel compelled to label the car dealer in question with that generalization (ignoring facts). But, at the same time, the plaintiff attorney also tried to position his client as a near Angel, by transferring desirable qualities to her (Christian).. But the plaintiff attorney also used the propaganda technique called "Black-or-White", so, no matter the culpability of the lady in the problem, the jury is made to think this is a battle of good vs evil, and you have to choose between them.

The plaintiff's attorney was obviously not trying to show facts (which didn't fall in his favor) but rather make this a case of emotions. It was a blatant attempt to move the real question aside, and just consider "good vs. evil". That is, of course could be called yet another technique "gross simplification of a complex problem".

In this case, the plaintiff's attorney won. Propaganda works. And so little is taught in schools as to what propaganda is, and how to recognize and thus ignore it when you see it. Especially where important decisions are at stake, such as political candidates, juries deciding cases, and products positioned and pitched to emotions rather than benefits.