

Propaganda is a set of the messages intended to influence opinions of the masses, not giving the opponents any opportunity to rebut the idea. Instead of telling people the truth, propaganda often aims at manipulation of ideas to influence the behavior of a large number of people. So, it presents ideas selectively. Propaganda is related to advertising, where it is about promoting a product. It is also used to influence religious beliefs of society.

During the 20th century, the term propaganda acquired a negative meaning in the western countries. It meant, a deliberate dissemination of frequently false, but 'obligating' justifications of certain political ideologies. The propagandist seeks to alter the way people understand an issue in favor of the interest group.

Here are some propaganda techniques to watch for:

Bandwagon: It aims at persuading people to do a certain thing because many other people are doing it. An example can be a soft drink advertisement wherein a large group of people is shown drinking the same soft drink. People feel induced to opt for that drink as it is shown to be consumed by many. Snob appeal is the reverse of bandwagon. It indicates that buying a certain product will make you stand out from the rest, as the masses won't afford to buy it.

Testimonial: This propaganda technique uses words of an expert or a famous person to promote a particular idea. For example, a sportsperson is shown recommending a brand of shoes. Generally, people idealize celebrated figures. So celebrities are used to advertise certain products. A testimonial has to be reasonable. Advertisers are cautioned not to use false testimonials, as they lack authenticity.

Transfer: In this technique, qualities of a well-known person are associated with a product to promote or demote it. Linking an item to a respected person is positive transfer. Creating an analogy between a disliked person and a product is negative transfer. It is also used during war times.

Repetition: It is when the product name is repeated many times during an advertisement. This technique may use a jingle, which is appealing to the masses and fits in their minds. Emotional words: This is meant to generate positive feelings in the minds of the masses. Words like 'luxury' or 'paradise' are used to evoke certain feelings in the minds of the people, which they associate with the product.

Glittering generalities is another important technique of propaganda. Generalities are logical fallacies. They are often vague but positive ideas. An example could be, "It's cool!" What is cool is not specified. It implies the use of appealing words giving no concrete idea of what the words are talking about. Another is calling for lower taxes for all, which glosses over differences between sales, wealth and income tax and differences in income tax brackets all of which mean that those with little wealth - and that are the apparent target of the tax-lowering politician's message - will see little benefit from lower taxes because they do not pay much tax already.

Name-calling, also called stereotyping or labeling is another propaganda technique. Direct name-calling is a direct attack on an opponent. If it is likely to annoy the audience, indirect name-calling is used. In this case, sarcasm is employed. Cartoons and photographs are used in name-calling. This technique is often used in politics. The technique of demonizing the enemy is related to this and makes the people with an opposing standpoint appear evil or inferior.

In the '**Plain Folks**' propaganda technique, common people are attracted on the basis of their common values. The current vernacular of the target audience is used. Scholastic speech seems artificial. So errors are made on purpose to give the feeling of spontaneity. 'Homey' words, as they are called, are used, so that the audience can connect to the propagandist. 'It's Morning in America' is an example of the 'Plain folks' strategy. This technique is used with glittering generalities.

'**Quotes out of Context**' is a technique of selectively changing quotes to change meanings. It is often used in political documentaries.

The '**Half truth**' technique makes use of a deceptive statement - it does not tell the 'whole story' or other sides to a story.

'**Card stacking**' is another propaganda technique, where information is manipulated to make a product or choice appear better. Only the facts in favor of the propagandist are used. In a debate on decriminalizing drugs those in favour of criminalizing them could 'card stack' by presenting the choice as one between stopping children from doing drugs (by criminalizing them) or letting children find out for themselves how drugs work (a position no serious commentator on the issue holds). The success of this technique lies in the choice of facts or cards and the way they are stacked by the propagandist.

'Card stacking' can be used with the '**straw man**' argument in which the opposing side's position is misrepresented (as is done above) or with the '**Black and White fallacy**', which aims at presenting only two choices to the public (leaving out the others).

At times, '**direct order**' is used whereby decision-making of the audience is simplified by telling them the steps they need to take.

'**Unstated assumption**' is another common technique used when the propagandist does not want to state the concept explicitly. Here the concept is instead repeatedly implied. This is often used in 'law and order', 'voter fraud', 'all lives matter', 'welfare queen' or 'strong borders' political discourse in the US - the unstated assumption being that white Americans are under threat from non-white 'outsiders'. This is also called '**dog-whistle**' politics. See more here: <https://everydayfeminism.com/2017/05/politicians-racial-dog-whistles/>

Unfortunately, most of us, at many points of time fall prey to propagandists and are tempted to do or believe the things they suggest us to.