

Propaganda & Manipulation - HardcoreInvestments



Today the term “propaganda” carries an unfortunate implication that suggests dishonest and calculating tactics, however that was not the original meaning intended for the term.

The word propaganda was derived from the Latin title of a committee of Roman Catholic cardinals, the Congregatio de Propaganda Fide (Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith).

This committee was called “propaganda” for short, and was established by Pope Gregory XV in 1622 to administer and provide overall leadership to Christian missionaries for the purpose of proselytism. Gradually, propaganda has come to mean any effort to spread a doctrine or ideology.

Notably, in the past many prominent people have used every available medium to spread their ideology to enhance their power and fame. Proving that the very concept of propaganda is not intrinsic to only the 17th century and the Catholic church.

Indeed, art has served manipulative individuals since the days of the Egyptian Pharaohs. These Pharaohs designed and built their pyramids to project an image of power, wisdom and durability. Similarly, the architecture of the Roman empire served the political purpose of enhancing and glorifying the state.

The term propaganda, took on a negative connotation during World War I and World War II, when governments began taking an active role in manipulating the war information disseminated by the state controlled media.

Even today, the media is attempting to manipulate and control the thoughts and beliefs of individuals with relentless and deceptive propaganda campaigns.

The advocates of these relentless media campaigns have a lot to gain, should they be able to convince individuals or nations of the righteousness of their suggestive manipulation.

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What are the most commonly used propaganda techniques:

Name calling:

This technique consists of attaching a negative label to a person or an idea. The individuals who use this technique hopes that their audience will reject the person or the idea because of the negative label, instead of looking at the available evidence.

Individuals engage in this type of behaviour when they are trying to avoid supporting their own opinions with fact. Rather than explain what they believe in, they prefer to try to tear their opponents down.

Glittering Generalities:

This technique utilises influential sounding words that have little or no real meaning. These words are used in general statements that cannot be proved or disproved. Words like good, honest, fair and best are examples of these words.

Slick advertising campaigns are full of glittering generalities. For example, statements such as "It contains a miracle ingredient" or "It's new and improved " tell people nothing about the product or the ingredients.

Transfer:

An attempt is made to transfer the prestige of a positive symbol to an individual or an idea. For example, using the American flag as a backdrop for a political event implies the event is patriotic and in the best interest of the USA.

Similarly transfer advertising is designed to manipulate the individual. For instance, the desire to protect the environment by selling something as "green" and environmentally friendly.

False Analogy:

In this technique, two items, concepts or events that may or may not be similar are portrayed as being similar. When examining the comparison without any specific evidence, it will become clear that there is simply not enough evidence available to support the comparison.

Testimonial:

High profile personalities and industry experts are utilise to endorse a product or service. Whenever you see someone famous endorsing a product, ask yourself how much does that individual know about the product, and what they stand to gain by promoting it.

Plain Folks:

Attempts are made to convince individuals to support someone or something, by communicating in the common mannerisms and style of their audience to win their trust and confidence.

Card Stacking:

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Card stacking or selective omission is used to slant a message. Keywords or unfavourable statistics will be omitted, leading to a series of half truths that enhance the positive qualities and ignores the negative ones. Keep in mind that a manipulator is only focused on their needs.

Bandwagon:

The bandwagon approach exploits the desire of most people to join the crowd and encourages you to think that because everyone else is doing something, you should do it too, or you will be left out. The technique embodies a keeping up with the Joneses philosophy.

Either / or:

This technique, falsely offers only two possible options even though several possible alternatives are readily available. You are either for something or against it, there is no middle ground or shades of Gray. It is used to polarise issues, and negates all and any attempts to find common ground.

Faulty Cause and Effect:

This suggests that because B follows A, A must cause B. We must recognise, that just because two events or data are related, it does not necessarily mean that one triggered the other to happen.

It is important to evaluate data and events carefully before jumping to false conclusions.

Errors of Faulty Logic:

Contradiction:

Information is presented that appears self-contradictory or inconsistent, and in direct opposition to other information supplied within the same argument.

Accident:

An individual fails to recognise, or deliberately conceals the fact that the argument under discussion is based on an exception to the rule.

False Cause:

A temporal order of events is confused with causality or, an individual oversimplifies a complex causal network to establish a cause and affect relationship that does not exist.

Begging the Question:

An individual or group makes a claim and then argues for it by advancing grounds whose meaning is simply equivalent to that of the original claim. This is also called circular reasoning.

Evading the Issue:

Individuals or a government sidesteps an issue intentionally by changing the topic or by manufacturing a crisis, to avoid any action to resolve the issue.

Arguing from Ignorance:

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An individual or group argues that a claim is justified simply because an opposite claim cannot be demonstrated. Best described by, "absence of evidence is not evidence of absence".

Composition and Division:

Composition involves an assertion about a whole that is true of its parts. Division is the opposite, an assertion about all the parts that are true about the whole.

Errors of Attack:

Poisoning the Well:

An individual is so committed to a certain perspective that they explain away absolutely everything others tender in opposition to that perspective.

Ad Hominem:

An individual or group rejects a pretext because of derogatory beliefs held by them, whether real or alleged about the individual making the claim.

Appealing to Force:

This is an argument where force, coercion or threats are given to establish and justify the validity of the pretext.

Appeal to Authority:

Authority is evoked as the final word on an issue. However, a legitimate authority speaking on their area of expertise may affirm a falsehood, therefore no testimony from any authority is guaranteed to be absolute.

Appeal to the People:

Is when an individual commences to assault an aspect of the other individual's character involved in the discussion, and utilises that as evidence for their lack of proficiency to deliver proof of their claim.

Appeal to Emotion:

Is an emotional laden appeal, whereby an individual or a group attempts to dominate an argument by trying to procure an emotional reaction from their opponent or audience.

The best defence:

Education and awareness has proved to be the best defence against propaganda and manipulation. Education shows you how to think. Propaganda tells you what to think.

Good educators present all sides of an hypothesis and encourage discussion. Propagandists relentlessly force you to hear their dogmas and discourage discussion, frequently their genuine motives are not discernible.

They scour the data, exploiting the favourable ones and concealing the others. Similarly they distort and twist data, specialising in fallacies as well as half truths. Your emotions, not your critical reasoning abilities, are their target.

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The propagandist makes certain that their message appears to be the right and moral one, and that it gives you a sense of importance and belonging if you follow it. You are the astute one, you are not alone, you are comfortable and secure.

However, forewarned is forearmed, and once you are familiar with some of their deceptions, you will be in a favourable position to evaluate any message or information that comes your way.

Forewarned:

Be selective, a completely open mind could be compared to a conduit that permits anything to flow through it, even sewage. No one wants a mind contaminated with poison, so we need to be selective. We need to scrutinise whatever is presented to us, adopting what to accept and what not to accept.

Nonetheless, we do not want to be so narrow minded that we refuse to consider facts that can embellish our critical reasoning.

Implement discernment, discernment is the ability to make wise judgements. It is the power or faculty of the mind by which it distinguishes one thing from another. A person with discernment perceives subtleties of ideas or things and has exceptional judgement.

Discernment enables you to discard irrelevant information or misleading facts and distinguish the substance of a matter. But how can you comprehend and discard irrelevant information when it is misleading and deceitful.

Test whatever, you read or are told to see if it is truthful. Some people today are like sponges, they soak up whatever they come across. And it is all too easy to absorb the mountains of deceitful information that is presented to us as gospel truth.

Ultimately, the ability to adopt a discerning mindset will provide the individual with lifelong rewards. By scrutinising anything you read, watch or listen to for manipulative or propagandistic overtones the individual can ensure they are acting of their own free will.

Fair minded:

Similarly, we must be amenable to subject our own perceptions and convictions to continual testing as we incorporate fresh information. We must realise that they are, after all, just untested perceptions and convictions.

Their trustworthiness depends on the validity of the facts, on the quality of our critical reasoning, and on the standards or values that we decide to employ.

Ask questions:

Undeniably, there are many who would choose to deceive us with persuasive and deceptive arguments. Therefore, when we are presented with a persuasive argument, we must ask questions.

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First, consider whether there is bias behind the message. What is the motive of the message and if the message is rife with name calling and loaded words, why is that.

Loaded language aside, what are the merits of the message itself. Moreover, if possible, evaluate the track record of those speaking. Are they known to speak the truth. If authorities are utilised, who or what are they.

Why should you regard this individual, organisation or publication as having expert knowledge or dependable information on the subject in question.

If you sense an appeal to your emotions, ask yourself, when observed dispassionately, what are the merits of the message.

Additionally, the exercise of popular opinion to further, suggestive manipulation is rife among influential media organisations. Popular conviction has not always been a dependable barometer of truth. Over time all kinds of ideas have been popularly accepted, only to be proved decisively inaccurate later.

Ultimately, if you conclude that contemporary popular opinion is not necessarily correct. And armed with the use of critical reasoning and a functioning understanding of the instruments that manipulating individuals, groups and governments utilise, you can find the strength to think and act differently.