Marketing and Communications

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Cara Mico

**Propaganda as Political Marketing:**

**A Brief History and Techniques Used in Politics and Advertising**

**Introduction**

The convergence of the American political machine and corporate marketing strategies is so steadfast that there is little difference between the propaganda of old and commercial advertising. Prior to the advent of contemporary advertising, politicians relied on experience, family and personal connections, as well as personality to win elections. The industrial revolution modernized this process and elections shifted towards a focus on slogans, logos, and catch-phrases such as “I like Ike.” Current methods of political advertising rely more on social media engagement and media visibility than on town-halls and policy white papers. There has been a similar shift in corporate marketing; sales prior to the industrial revolution were often about building personal relationships with the artisan, craftsman, or in some cases travelling salesmen. With industrialization the entire approach to sales shifted towards market-trend analysis and the modern advertising agency emerged. Commercial advertising and political propaganda in the twentieth century have evolved in tandem and the overlap of interests, players, and purposes is so strong that it can be argued there is no substantive difference between the two.

The industrialization of the United States was predicated on the success of the military industrial complex. Investments in oil, gold, and other resources were secured through political ties between wealthy land owners, business owners, and politicians. Investments in these businesses by political leaders is common but now, more than ever, these investments are at risk from environmental regulations, new technologies, and shifting cultural values. That risk was so strong that an oligarchy has purchased the United States government and brainwashed the uneducated, conservative, poor citizen into believing anything the puppet figure-head says. The techniques used in the 2016 presidential election have been used before, but they have been upgraded for the new century. This paper will briefly look at propaganda as a marketing strategy throughout history and compare the various techniques used in both methods of advertising.

**Historical Context**

Propaganda is not a modern invention, as long as there has been the written word, people have used propaganda to perpetuate ideologies that support belief systems beneficial to their preferred culture. In Propaganda Part 1: A History of Propaganda from Ancient Greece to Abraham Lincoln, the producer identifies the earliest use of propaganda when Alexander the Great used his imagery on coins and statues to form a collective identity, which is still in use today in many nationalistic advertisements such Uncle Sam. Religious propaganda was used to support the crusades (along with many other persuasive techniques that will not be discussed here). But the earliest use of the word propaganda dates back to the 1600’s when the Catholic church generated the Propaganda de Fidei to disseminate the teachings of the church. (Creel, 1941)

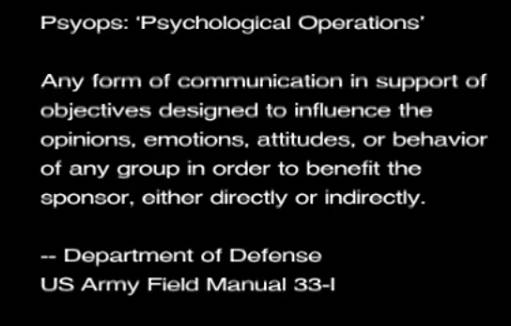
George Creel is considered to be a forefather of modern propaganda (1876-1953), and headed the Committee for Public Information which was formed to convert Americans from pacifists to soldiers. (How we advertised america, introduction to propaganda, n.d.) “Since the morale of the front line derives directly from the morale of the civilian population from which the armed forces are drawn, the mind of a nation must be mobilized no less than its manpower.” For Creel, propaganda needed to be rooted in truth for free people could not be told what to think. He believed that morale could be bolstered through honest propaganda but that propaganda was a necessary tool in the fight for national unity. He argued that the great wars of history were fought on public opinion. However, he believed that many people viewed propaganda as intrinsically evil and the root cause of the first world war. (Creel, 1941) Bernays’ 1928 work, “Propaganda” opens with the powerful concept, “We are governed, our minds are molded, our tastes are formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of.” By 1942 Bernays argued that governments were already using propaganda to engineer democracy by using traditional marketing tactics such as asking, “what are we selling?” (Bernays, 1942)

“Every true propangandist hates most bitterly his nearest political neighbor” (Johnson, 1949) World War II saw the rise of global propaganda, each country involved promoting its ideology uncompromisingly and destroying any person that opposed their message. And during this war *everything* was used as propaganda, including music. (Lee, 2014) In Japan, the need of media for war propaganda was known since WWI and implemented in 1934 after the Nazi model influenced Japanese thinking. “Eventually, propagandistic magazines and photo journals were launched in Japan, including Shuh¯ o¯ (Weekly report) in 1936 and Shashin Shuh¯ o¯ (Photographic weekly report) in 1938.” (Germer, 2013) While Japanese military officials shunned traditional advertising because it promoted products deemed culturally offensive such as feminine hygiene products, they viewed advertising as a necessary evil. This is where the use of advertising as propaganda during the WWII era took hold in Japan, they used the industry to promote ‘the right kind of culture.’ By 1940, Japanese advertising companies were blurring the line between propaganda and marketing and rebranded the term propaganda to ‘media.’ The advertisers blatantly admitted that the news was not just for reporting factual events, but also for promoting the national will in the war against China. Japanese propaganda men studied German and Russian propaganda and mimicked the look and feel of photography, layout, and messaging. (Kushner, 2005)

The Classic work by Jacques Ellul “Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes” notes in 1965 that propaganda is no longer used for the individual but is based on the sciences of psychology and sociology and used en masse. When the individual is reduced to an average their psychic defenses are reduced and become more prone to suggestion because they feel like their collective action will amount to something. “The mass man is clearly subhuman but pretends to be superhuman.” Propaganda must utilize all forms of media to be successful. The ultimate goal of propaganda is to convince the enemy to admit it’s weaknesses *while it’s still the enemy.* Ellul said that propaganda for the masses benefited the general population in that it could serve as a tool to make sense of the chaotic outside world. (Ellul, 1965)

However, propaganda is often used to manipulate the public into supporting what the government has already decided to do. “Because of the term has such negative connotation associated with it, we don’t identify much of what we see as propaganda, even though it is.” (From Nazi’s to ISIS; A Historical Analysis of Technology and Propaganda. , 2015) Germany at the time of the Nazis had more printed material in terms of daily, weekly, and monthly newspapers and periodicals than anywhere in the world. Part of Hitler’s success was reliant on this infrastructure and German children grew up hearing this propaganda on the radio. The argument is that the two groups had access to tools for message dissemination (radio/print/film for Nazis and Twitter/Social Media for ISIS), but also had the social instability and the overall desire for meaning, unification, and national-pride which, when combined with an ideological zeal, allowed the organizers to amass a wide audience very quickly.

Alex Scary and others have found that it’s in western democracy and open societies, you need propaganda, it’s like a business. It’s considered perception management. An example of perception management, the Tactical Ops Team saw the toppling of the statue of Saddam Hussein after the liberation of Iraq as a strategic opportunity, one of the most iconic images of the Iraq War was staged. PR specialists now outnumber journalists and the PR industry is a $200 billion/year industry. “We market candidates the way we market toothpaste, automobiles.” Noam Chomsky in Psywar, on the 2008 marketing campaign of the year going to the Obama campaign. “The purpose of propaganda is to make you feel better about something.” (Psyops: The Full Documentary, 2014)



d: Psywar, Full Documentary

**Lexicon - Propaganda versus Marketing**

**Reframing**: Propaganda twists conventionally accepted definitions into new contexts. For example, the use of the term, “Alternative Facts” could be considered reframing the term “Lying”. An example of the reframing in the marketing world would be the attempt to make cigarettes appear healthy. Institutions such as BP, Standard Oil, and other mega-corporations have used reframing to highlight the limited work they are doing to mitigate the vast damages caused by their harmful practices. Standard Oil used this method to reframe their impact on small businesses stating instead that they were a boon to the local economy in that they reinvested hundreds of millions of dollars by purchasing locally where possible. The American government used this method to promote war efforts by focusing on the investments created from industries related to war, shifting attention away from the destruction modern colonialism wrought. (Rosenberg, 1952)

**Repeated Affirmations and Repetition**: In propaganda, repetition serves to tell the same lie until it becomes truth, this can be observed in the repeated claim that millions of people voted illegally in the 2016 presidential election in the United States. Using the cigarette example, by repeating that cigarettes are healthy for decades, the collective consciousness begins to assert that cigarettes are indeed healthy. This is used the same way in both advertising and in propaganda. It’s equally effective in both ways, the more you see something, the more likely you are to remember it, the more likely you are to retain it, and the more likely the message will influence your decisions. With marketing you are using repetition to sell a product or an event, with propaganda you are using repetition to sell an ideology.

**Distraction and Denial:** A modern example can be seen in the focus shift away from conflicts of interest involving the newly elected president of the United States towards an unprecedented number of executive orders and Twitter wars with private persons and businesses. “An important part of the technique of creating good will or a favorable impression is to avoid any references which might have the opposite effect.” Just as politicians and government officials use this technique to gloss over ethics violations, conflicts of interest, or any other unsavory truth, companies consistently use this practice to downplay the negative impacts of their practices on the environment, communities, and people. (Rosenberg, 1952) In propaganda, Bernays found that messaging in the first world war was using this effectively by ensuring that the public believed any negative messaging was the result of enemy lies. (Bernays, 1942)

**Classical and Operational Conditioning:** Becoming familiar through normalization over a long period of time. Germer refers to the visibility of a person equating to political power and suggests that President Barack Obama’s success was due in part to his visibility. Another aspect of conditioning is the idea of ‘othering’ which was a primary strategy of propagandists in WWII, the idea that us vs. them is the only way. In Japan this was seen in the women’s magazine Nippon Fujin that used political cartoons and imagery to form an idea of the other. German war time propaganda focused on race while Japanese propaganda focused on culture. The response from the United States was to characterize the Japanese people as animals, this dehumanization is a form of classical conditioning. (Germer, 2013) This dehumanization was a tactic also used in the first world war in order to break the enemy moral. (Bernays, 1942)

**Placement:** How and where information is disseminated is a key component of how it is consumed. During the first world war and in wars to follow, leaflets were dropped by all sides both on friendly and foreign territory to control the moral of those bellow. (Bernays, 1942) Modern methods of placement in political advertising are more complex. In a Washington Post interview published in the summer of 2016, the strategies of the two primary American presidential candidates was evaluated. Clinton’s strategy focused on pods that treated groups of people with similar demographics to marketing strategies that were tailored to that group. Trump focused more on the traditional state line electoral college strategy as well as other methods. Clinton placed strategic advertisements based on demographics rather than using broad social media engagement. Both candidates messaging promoted strong ideologies and were arguably propaganda. (Tankersley, 2016)

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**Other Resources**

http://www.slideshare.net/lrathert1/propaganda-in-advertising?next\_slideshow=2