

## **Propaganda as a Form of Manipulation**

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### **Abstract**

The article aims to define the term “propaganda”, its external features, techniques and methods of conveying the message. According to the specialist Malcolm X, “the media's the most powerful entity on Earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent, and that's power. Because they control the minds of the masses.”

**Keywords:** propaganda, manipulation, message

**JEL classification:** Z13, Y80

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The word *propaganda* first appears in 1689. It comes from the Latin phrase *congregatio de propaganda fide*, that is “congregation for the propagation of the faith” (Volkoff, 2004). The term obviously implies conveying information to the public, information that should be saluted for that and which is not perceived by the informant as untrue but rather as an expression of the only existing truth. However, the essence of the term has distorted quickly, therefore, as of 1972, propaganda has been defined as a systematic activity of conveyance, promotion or dissemination of doctrines, theses or ideas from the standpoint of certain social groups and ideologies in order to influence, change, acquire concepts, attitudes, opinions, beliefs and behaviours. Most often, propaganda forms into a subsystem of the political system of a party, of a social group or of a governing regime and it aims to manipulate (Domenach, 1965; Cazeneuve, 1976; Iorgulescu, 2014).

A first connection that experts call *congenital*, is the one between propaganda - persuasion and argumentation. “The overall development of history - as Jean Cazeneuve (1976, p. 371) points out - apparently went from *propaganda* in the service of ideology, ideology in the service of *propaganda*, going through a moment of development of propaganda ideology. The social practice of *propaganda* and the social fact of ideology seem to occur with empires and major religions of salvation. The former, political and religious ideologies are subject to a symbolic *propaganda* through art and image on the one hand, and habits on the other. From the beginning *ideological propaganda* is symbolic and normative. In the 20th century, the decline of ideology in favour of *propaganda* finds its counterpart in the sensory effect of new media and the fragmentation of time that they favour.”

Referring to the external characteristics of propaganda, it “addresses the individual and the mass simultaneously, it uses all the technical means available (press, radio, television, posters, brochures, cinema), it is continuous and permanent, in order to cause adhesion and to urge the receiver to act”.

Regarding the internal features of propaganda, they determine the five “laws” that govern its operation:

- *the rule of simplification* (simple topics that focus the energy of targets towards the unique enemy).
- *of thickening and disfigurement* (exaggeration of facts).
- *of the orchestration* (repeating messages and adapting them to various categories of audience, so that those targeted would not be able to think of something else).

- *of transfusion* (attacking the beliefs of the individual using his/her own prejudices).

- *the rule of unanimity and contagion* (which is synonymous to the use of the individuals' taste for conformism).

## 2 PROPAGANDA TECHNIQUES

The techniques of propaganda aim at the emotional side, not the rational one and they aim to create *conditioned reflexes*, so that individuals should react to "stimuli" in the same way as Pavlov's dogs. From this point of view, *propaganda* acts as a general and universal form of subjecting the masses, as it is based on the diversion of natural impulses of people (sex, food) to topics previously determined by the propaganda body. And the slogan ensures the unity of a diversified *propaganda*, targeting the divergent interests of each subculture; each group is convinced by a different reading of the same text and the outlook changes according to the perception.

Relying on symbols (swastika, hammer and sickle, hymns, slogans) and on repetitive behaviours, propaganda causes a real "psychological aggression". In this violent process, media has powerful effects which are privileged in the system of propaganda means. Propaganda techniques have a greater effect when they practised on human communities in crisis.

Most often, propaganda is used in politics to spread a doctrine, a theory, an opinion and to win over people to adhere to those beliefs. The subordination of media to socio-political objectives and co-opting media in the official propaganda system were the defining features of communist media operation. From this perspective, communist propaganda was extremely efficient because its targets were exhausted, impoverished and emotionally weakened by the consequences of the Second World War. Applying propaganda techniques over long periods of time (between 45 and 60 years) within totalitarian systems in Central and Eastern Europe had some effects that have been and continue to be surprising even for subjects undergoing brainwashing propaganda. Thus, in politics, specialists distinguish between the following types of propaganda:

a) *white propaganda*:

It uses materials that come from official sources, containing artistic, cultural news that appear to be harmless, e.g.: lifestyle, presentation of personalities that can serve as an example for the cultural, sports and musical life. The psychological value of such collages can be remarkable for listeners (readers) with poor training. Research

reveals a greater efficiency of white propaganda among young people by the transmission of radio broadcasts of modern music, which interleaves news with an average duration.

b) *black propaganda*:

It generally spreads "fabricated" materials, attributed either to non-existent institutions that the receiver cannot control or to institutions that have activities other than to fabricate news.

c) *grey propaganda*:

It is most frequently used by information centres. It consists in combining partially real information with fully fake news, constructing news that appears to be precise, which cannot be fully verified. The public can be easily misled by such fabrication, scribing the news to personal gaps of information (Roşca, 2006; Marcu, 2009).

A sociological study distinguished a few ways and means of conveying the essential message aimed at the following sides:

- *affective* - consists in structuring messages in such a way that they can provoke feelings and collective solidarity, particularly emotional. Firstly, it shows the negative consequences of personal choices caused by a specific action, then it shows a different alternative that would have only positive effects. Special attention is given to the presentation of distinctive facts, focusing on that information that has an intense emotional resonance. Although they are not passive, masses are not always well informed, their interest in politics is sporadic, their direct political experience is limited, as they are involved in their daily routine.

- *persuasive* - consists in the use of rhetorical rules of speech organization, especially through the use of emotionally saturated words and based on the persuasibility of audience members. These aspects are visible in all types of discourse practised in the Romanian media, but especially in the political discourse, the language of which bears a striking resemblance to the journalistic and even colloquial language.

There is another significant difference between *tactical propaganda* (developed over a short period of time, established to gain immediate effects) and *strategic propaganda* (developed over a long period of time in order to form or change attitudes, values, concepts) (Tran & Stănciugelu, 2003; Jivan, 2015). A major feature of propaganda is that it stimulates the attempt to manipulate the intelligence, but in reality, it hits its maximum effectiveness, targeting the most irrational of our faculties.

## CONCLUSION

However, even when they distort the truth, which often happens, propagandas present with an unveiled face (this is the main difference between propaganda and disinformation). We can distinguish between red or brown propaganda, pacifist or warlike, racist or anti-racist, it may say whatever it wants, without hidden intentions. (Volkoff)

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