



Propaganda Revisited: Understanding Propaganda in the Contemporary Communication Oriented World

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Abstract

Propaganda had always remained a very important tool to influence others. Many researchers had worked and synthesized the concept of propaganda. But there was still a lot to be done as the contemporary propaganda industries had given this phenomenon a very subtle structure. This particular research study aimed to analyze the propaganda definitions set forth by various propaganda researchers to develop a comprehensive definition of the concept. For this purpose definitions provided by thirty different propaganda scholars had been analyzed to identify various elements of propaganda. Fourteen most frequently occurring elements were identified. On the basis of these elements, a comprehensive definition of propaganda was constructed to enhance the propaganda literature of Pakistan, which was the target of international propaganda from last couple of decades. This research paper would open new horizons for Pakistani researchers in the field of propaganda.

Key Words: Propaganda, Definitions, Propaganda Analysis, Propaganda Literature, Propaganda Researchers, Elements of Propaganda

Introduction

Development of propaganda and propaganda products in the previous century was very astonishing (Doob, 1944). From the previous century propaganda had become one of the vital tools of national course of action (Palmer & Perkins, 2005). And it would not be wrong to say that the previous century was the era of propaganda. Efforts to influence people are implemented from the times immemorial (Taylor, 2004). Propaganda was although a kind of communication but it had differences from the other forms of persuasive communication techniques (Wilcox Ault & Agee, 1995).

Propaganda industry had gained momentum around the world in contemporary societies. States were busy in influencing other states by using various types of communication techniques including propaganda. But many did not understand what propaganda exactly was.

In the current paper the researcher would try to explore the concept of propaganda by critically analyzing definitions and concept of propaganda given by many propaganda scholars over the years. The change in the research trend from analysis of propaganda to statistical research in communication had an overwhelming influence on propaganda definition (Sproule, 1987). In the light of these previous definitions, the researcher would contribute to the propaganda literature by constructing a comprehensive definition of propaganda. The core objective of the present research was to construct a comprehensive definition of propaganda during the contemporary era especially in Pakistani context. There was a dire need of developing propaganda literature in Pakistan so that people could be able to grasp international propaganda targeted at Pakistan.

Method

The researcher collected a sufficient amount of propaganda definitions given by well-known propaganda scholars and researchers in the previous and present century. A rigorous analysis of all the definitions was conducted. All the definitions were dissected then to develop a thorough and in depth understanding. Similarities and differences in these definitions and concepts would be highlighted during the course of this research article. Common elements present in the definitions would be explored. And at the end a comprehensive definition of propaganda would be constructed.

Propaganda Definitions

Numerous definitions of propaganda were presented by various researchers and propagandists. Bernays, while defining

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propaganda observed that no English language word was “so badly distorted” (Bernays, 1928). Plaisance (2005) said that most of the literature was concerned with identification of propaganda attributes of communication but what actually propaganda was, yet to be defined (Combs & Nimmo, 1993; Altheide & Johnson, 1980; Doob, 1935; Cunningham, 2002; Sproule, 1988). Many researchers had tried to formulate a sound propaganda definition. Some of the most relevant and famous definitions of propaganda found in the propaganda literature would be conversed here.

Lippmann defined the term propaganda in 1922 in his manuscript “Public Opinion”. He narrated that propaganda content changed the substance of the issue and presented substitute social pattern for another (Lippmann, 1997). It showed that for Lippmann propaganda changed the situations which were important for people. People responded only to things which affected them and which were considered worthwhile for them. The propagandists spin those situations by using different techniques. Lasswell (1927) identified these techniques in his definition of propaganda as, to organize opinion by vital symbols, by pictures, rumors, stories, and other forms of social communication. Lasswell (1995) was of the opinion that propaganda was an attempt to influence public opinion by manipulating the content.

Propaganda persuaded people to do what propagandist wanted them to do. Propagandist controlled the illustrations and depictions. And so made people perform roles which propagandists chose for them to perform. Propagandist painted the picture of situations according to his own desire. So that he could influence the deeds of people. Lasswell maintained that every communication targeted to persuade humans was called propaganda (1937).

Catlin (1936) followed Lasswell’s point of view of propaganda. For him putting ideas in the minds without causing any pressure was propaganda. It worked a bit more than disseminating information. It worked to gather public support in favor of the organization which was concerned. People were influenced in a way that they remained unconscious of the influences and their effects.

Lee and Lee (1939) argued that propaganda was every type of communication planned to gain “predetermined ends” whether destructive or useful (p. 15). Lee and Lee were of the opinion that propagandist never took interest in the effects of propaganda information. If a piece of information was valuable it did not mean that it would not be propaganda. Propaganda always had a purpose and whatever information was disseminated was based on this purpose. Propagandist designed the message in such a way which would make it easier to achieve his objectives. And for achieving his objectives, sometimes he made suitable changes in the content. As the Institute of Propaganda Analysis (IPA, 1939) stated that public opinion and individuals’ response were deliberately manipulated for predetermined results. Such opinion which was intentional so that it could help to alter the opinion of others and it had preplanned outcomes. So it was very clear that propaganda’s outcome and result was prearranged. And it was tried to attain by using all types of communication.

According to Henderson (1943), propaganda was not a rational process which included pressures tactics to persuade public opinion and frame such attitudes and opinion that suited propagandist desires. Henderson (1943) said about propaganda that it was an irrational system where propagandee was pressurized by the propagandist to make the propagandee do whatever the propagandist wanted him/her to do without giving it much thought. Propagandist attacked the propagandee with information and compelled him to act in a particular way. Propagandist made people believe that the propagandist’s way was the only safe way for them and they should immediately adopt it.

Doob (1948) argued that propaganda was such an effort which influenced people and controlled their behaviors for specific purpose. Such activities created unscientific and doubtful value in a society.

Hummel and Huntress (1949) stressed that propaganda material influenced one’s belief and action. It was just like an assault on public perception regarding any issue which could be conveyed through newspapers, TV, radio, film or theatre. Hummel and Huntress (1949) went a step further by saying that propaganda could bring a change either in people’s thoughts or actions. They second the opinion of Henderson (1943) by saying that through propaganda, people’s faiths were attacked in an organized way. And such ideas were flooded which strengthened the interests of propagandist only pertaining ideas survive and the rest of the information is wiped out of people’s minds. They further identified the media used for propaganda as was identified by Lasswell (1927). But instead of identifying “vital symbols, pictures, rumors and stories (Lasswell, 1927), they identified more contemporary media like, newspapers, radio content, reading materials, and as theatre such as motion pictures, and TV. But personal contact was such a medium which importance was recognized by both Lasswell as well as by Hummel and Huntress for doing propaganda.

After Second World War, propaganda definitions presented a different angle grounded in political theory, structure/function and effects/ process of mass communication. Few researchers like Lee (1952), rigidly followed the “humanity-as-victim” model for explaining propaganda as a process which is forceful, subtle and past common sense.

In Lee’s (1952) point of view, propaganda was emotional. According to his view point, propaganda was a combination of different words, images, visuals, characters, drama and other symbols that were manipulated through emotional appeal. Such type of content could be true or partially true or unclear or incorrect.

Lee’s views about propaganda were a bit similar to that of Henderson (1943) in a way that Henderson called propaganda irrational and Lee (1952) says it “emotional”. It means that emotional language and messages were disseminated while doing propaganda so that public’s attention could be easily captured. When people become emotional they did not think rationally

and it turned out to be beneficial for the propagandist. Lee (1952) said that sometimes this emotional information was sometimes true, sometimes partially true, sometimes confusing between truth and lie and sometimes totally false. We could not say that only false information could be propaganda. Propagandist used that information which was beneficial for his cause either truthful or false.

Schramm (1955a) pointed that propaganda was not about telling lies to the public but one selected the truth according to one's desire and then mixed up with the story that public wanted to hear. Schramm's version of propaganda was a little different from the propaganda concept of Lee (1952). Instead of using direct lies, Schramm said that propagandist could select truth. Here he was pointing out to a propaganda device called "card stacking" in which just one side of the situation was shown. Propagandist only used that aspect of any situation which was favorable for his cause. This way he "selects" the truth.

For Toulmin (1958) propaganda was such information without the support of facts. So it was clear that propagandists made claims without provision of proof. They did not provide evidence. Propagandists created mere assertions. They did not support their claims because these claims were just assertions. A rhetorical usage of this phenomenon was the word "terrorist"; suggested by Severin and Tankard (2001).

In his book about psychological warfare and propaganda, Qualter (1962) argued that propaganda was a deliberate effort to control and change the opinion of other people by the use of different means of communication with the attention that any circumstances the response of the influenced people would be according to the desires of propagandist. Qualter (1962) pointed out that the expression "the deliberate attempt" was the main idea of the concept of propaganda in the definition provided by him. He contends that "beyond doubt" means that one can use anything as propaganda.

Ellul (1964, 1965), being a French social philosopher, contributed significant ideas in the propaganda literature. Ellul (1973) expressed that we were living in a society where most parts of the social system were trying to persuade others and wanted to evolve active or passive support of a mass of individuals for their interests through psychologically manipulated communication.

Propaganda in the words of Ellul (1965) "seeks to induce action, adherence and participation- with as little thought as possible (p. 180)..... Propaganda standardized current ideas, hardens existing stereotypes and furnishes thought patterns in all areas. Thus it codified social, political and moral standards" (p. 163). Propaganda strived to bring action in the desired audience without thinking over logically. Propaganda brought harmony in the existing thoughts, strengthens present orthodoxy. The purpose of propaganda was to bring about harmony in the ideas which were beneficial for the propaganda source.

Ellul (1965) said that propaganda was the provision of enduring and prevalent education by using mass media which legalized the current economic and political elites. It showed that propaganda was used by mostly elites to make their ideologies acceptable. Propaganda was a form of mass communication that is prepared by a group or groups (Ellul, 1973). Jacques Ellul is considered a very influential post-war period writer of propaganda.

Merril and Lownstein (1971) wrote in their book about mass media in the contemporary times in which they examined propaganda and its practices in the modern media. Merrill says that they analyzed different definitions of propaganda and found some themes or core ideas in them, "manipulated handling of content," "purposeful management," "predetermined ideas," "desired implications," "strengthening biases", "irrational approach," and creation of "dispositions".

Ellul (1981) presented that propaganda was malevolent and in contradiction to the ethics. He was of the opinion that propaganda becomes even more dangerous and develops false impressions because

- i- If the propagandist had the power, it did not mean that he has all the rights to use it.
- ii- History, suitably and philosophy were the foundations of an ethical life, which were deteriorated by propaganda.
- iii- Propaganda replaced the reality with enforced reality and restrict the point of view of other side that was very important for building rational approach (Combs & Nimmo, 1993; Cunningham, 1992; Ellul, 1981; Johannesen, 1983).

Lindhal (1983) defined propaganda as, a methodical and measured process which targets to alter information and attitude to obtain positive responses. Lindhal (1983) said that propaganda was a well-planned effort. Moreover, propaganda information was disseminated intentionally. This well-planned and intentional information was presented to get altered attitudes to endorse propagandist's thoughts. Likely, Smith (1989) delineated propaganda as, an effort to persuade people to yield a specific outcome by regulating arguments.

In contemporary understanding propaganda was intentionally misleading information (Pratkanis & Aronson, 1991). They said that propaganda was any communication which was intentional and aimed to persuade. It was clear from their definition that propaganda was such a piece of information which deceptive and confusing. The propagandist spread this misleading information by choice. He deliberately misled the public. And his goal was to secure the public consent so that he could achieve the public response according to his will.

Jowett and O'Donnell's (1992) definition of propaganda was again used by Cozma (2015) when she operationalized propaganda in her study as, a deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate knowledge, and direct

behavior to achieve a direct response. It was a well quoted concept of propaganda. According to Jowett and O'Donnell (1992) propaganda was not only intentional but it is also very well planned. Propagandist very stealthily formulated the thoughts of public. At this stage he slyly disseminated messages and provokes thoughts in the public's mind. His aim at this stage was to make the public mind deviate from their own ideologies. At the second step the propagandist influences the knowledge of public. His objective here was to alter the mindset of public by intentionally providing them biased information. The propagandist did all this fuss to get a certain outcome from the public. He guided the public what their behavior should be. The propagandist provided directions to the public about the physical outcome of their thoughts. Propagandist guided them in certain ways so that they responded the way propagandist wanted them to.

Pratkanis and Aronson (1992) commented that propaganda was a persuasive tactic which got popularity in modern world. The basic objective of propaganda was that to convince the recipient towards the position of propagandist. Pratkanis and Aronson (1992) said that propagandist put his every effort to make public behave in a certain way. Propagandist performed his job so artfully that public could never get the idea that their behaviors were the outcome of some external and intentional stimuli. Public received the information considering it neutral and unbiased. But this information affected them cleverly. They could never get the idea that they were getting influenced and their ideas were not originally theirs.

Sproule (1994) stated that propaganda was an activity of big organizations and groups to influence public opinion for their interests through propagating attractive conclusions and concealing their hidden interests. In the words of Sproule (1994) large groups used propagandistic message so that they could influence public. Their aim was the same, as mentioned by many other propaganda scholars, to persuade the public to act according to the propagandist's desires. Propagandists portrayed a picture of fancy and striking results, if their way was followed. He concealed his objectives because if the objectives would be known to the public, they would not act as desired by the propagandist. Moreover, the propaganda was never logical. Propagandists presented hopes about good results so that the irrationality of his information could not be judged.

The French expert on propaganda, Jaques Ellul (as cited in Shaughnessy, 1996) argued that "nearly all biased messages were propagandistic even when the biases were unconscious" (p.56). He means that some prejudiced message was being flowed it definitely would have a purpose. If someone was bestowing an opinionated version of a piece of information it was obvious that he had some vested interests in presenting that information. Even if the inclination in the message was unintentional, the message would be propaganda. Because it was quite understandable that everyone wanted to secure one's interests. So one would do everything to support his interests' whether intentionally or unintentionally.

Edelstein (1997) wrote that "old propaganda", is employed by government and elites in "a hierarchical mass culture" where a small number of people speak to a large public (p. 5) and the goal is to "the control and manipulation of the mass culture" (p.4).

Jowett and O' Donnell (1999), two very popular propaganda theorists, argued that propaganda was careful and organized effort to frame public perception, manipulate understandings and actions to attain desired response for the propagandist.

Black (2001) proposed a new definition of propaganda on the basis of three language characteristics: (a) simple and perfect answers usually provided by authoritative sources, (b) a world where good guys and bad guys are easily identifiable, (c) simple relations between causes and effects. Black (2001) explains the changing definitions of propaganda. Because the definitions reflected either we take propaganda as a pejorative phenomenon or an ethical phenomenon. Black (2001) called propaganda as a "beast". Because as a monster destroys everything for its satisfaction, in the same way propaganda presents prejudiced information to destroy public's natural thought and to replace them with ready-made thoughts.

Cunningham (2002) was of the opinion that propaganda was not just random messages that could be separated from its context rather it is a form of life in which modern human society lived. He said that propaganda messages could be separated from their context. Propagandist molded every piece of information to get his purpose. For this reason, he presented all information in the same context.

Bernays (2004) commented that propaganda was an organized effort to affect public opinion for the interest of specific group, idea or class. The concept of propaganda given by Bernays was very comprehensive. Bernays seconds the opinion of Sproule (1994) when he said that propaganda was done to meet the interests of some group. The public was influenced to get their support for some notion, organization or collection of individuals. Bernays said that propaganda was a constantly continuing effort. The propagandist kept on working on his cause until he got the desired results. Propagandist put every effort to create events to get public support. Events occurred naturally. When propagandists created events it means that they manipulated situations to gain favors. And these manipulations were presented in such a way that it would become a stimulus to the public for support to the propagandist's cause.

Curnalia (2005) believed that propaganda was a systematic effort to influence the perception of the people for which different mediums were used for prolonged time period. Such activities tailored public opinion and action through emotional and aesthetic appeals. Curnalia's version of propaganda was quite detailed. According to her, propaganda was a sequence of messages where well-planned messages were circulated by propagandists. Propagandists tried to use as many sources for message dissemination as possible so that they can reach maximum audience. These messages were not presented for a specific

time. Rather these were flowed for a long period of time. So that could affect maximum number of target public. Propagandists used different tactics to gain their objective including selecting some information from a whole body of information. This was called card stacking. Fervent words were used to make public emotional. Lucid and artistic techniques were used to attract the public. Propagandists used all these techniques so that public immediately grasps their message without giving it a careful thought. They try to block the ability of rational in the public. Because when they will carefully scrutinize the message, they will definitely reach to some logical conclusion and on the basis of this logical solution they will think about adopting or rejecting the message. That is why propagandists work their way from all possible directions so that they can make public respond in a specific way.

However, Sproule (1994) and Bernays (2004) said that propaganda could be done by individuals to influence other individual or group of individuals. But Doob (2008) argued that propaganda was a planned dissemination of information which is done so that one can govern the public. First actions are suggested but finally the propagandists govern the attitudes, behaviors and ideologies of propagandees.

Uudelepp (2008) also concluded that propagandist worked to shape public opinion, attitudes and actions. According to Uudelepp (2008) propaganda was used to form attitudes of the public. Through biased information public is influenced and their thought are molded the way propagandist wants to mold them. Propagandist uses all the cues present in the context where the propagandee is living so he could be effected using emotional tactic and stereotypes of that society. And when propaganda combines with organized persuasion its theoretical scope become so broad that constructing a definition becomes very difficult (Koppang, 2009).

Like many previous researchers Koppang (2009) said that propaganda was planned information which is disseminated to hundreds. Propaganda is done to support some cause which is not disclosed. Moreover propaganda was done in a way that it blocks public's ability to think about some issue logically. Koppang (2009) wrote that after World War II, a thought evoked that propaganda did not exist anymore but a broader implication of propaganda suggests that every persuasive piece of communication is propaganda.

Some scholars (Jowett & O'Donnell, 1999; Combs & Nimmo, 1993; Smith, 1989; Pratkanis & Aronson, 1992) present a different picture of propaganda by covering the areas of politics and modern culture. They argue that it is not always obligatory for propaganda to be systematic and purposive as was thought about essential by earlier definitions of propaganda.

Different researchers present varied views and definitions of propaganda. Being an enriched area of research propaganda has remained a subject of constant attention. But unfortunately very little work has been done on this topic in Pakistan. Being the target of international propaganda there is an utmost need of research and development of this field in Pakistan. Only by developing a thorough understanding of propaganda, we could devise tactics to handle international propaganda against Pakistan.

Conclusion

After conducting a rigorous analysis of all the above cited definitions, some shared essentials of propaganda were identified. These were the basic factors which were continually used by several propaganda specialists in their propaganda definitions.

- Powerful
- Controls the public
- Works slyly
- Has prearranged ends
- Irrational process
- Supports doubtful situations
- Affects beliefs and actions
- Uses mass communication and personal contact
- Emotions are used
- Use selected truth
- Lacks proof
- Deliberate and conscious effort
- Done by some group
- Hateful

On the base of former definitions and these factors the researcher constructed an all-inclusive and comprehensive though exhaustive definition of propaganda

“Propaganda is a deliberate, conscious, malicious and cunning effort which is done by some group, organization or individual to control and influence public’s beliefs and actions to achieve predetermined ends by using selected truth, through mass communication and personal contact.”

The arena of propaganda was an enormous. States are working tirelessly in understanding and employing propaganda to accomplish their ends. Numerous researchers had played their role and put efforts to augment the field of research. Restructuring the theory of propaganda was never ending process and it would keep on blooming in the future. Pakistani researchers need to put their efforts to enhance this field of research. Their contributions in this regard would definitely bring a positive change in the international image building of Pakistan.

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