

The image features two thick black L-shaped brackets. One is positioned on the left side, with its vertical bar extending downwards and its horizontal bar extending to the right. The other is on the right side, with its vertical bar extending upwards and its horizontal bar extending to the left. These brackets frame the central text.

PROPAGANDA AND PERSUASION IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

Propaganda and Persuasion

- Each involves the skillful presentation of an argument in an attempt to convince someone of the rightness of a cause, the value of a service or the merit of an idea—all ethical and respectable goals.
- But a darker side to persuasive communication can be seen in activities such as false advertising, information campaigns that withhold important facts and deliberate misrepresentations by public officials. This type of persuasion is *propaganda*—persuasive communication gone bad.

Concept of Propaganda

- The problem with propaganda, as the term now is understood, is not that it promotes ideological causes but that it does so dishonestly.
- Propaganda foists its message on an unsuspecting audience and indoctrinates people without their realizing what is happening.
- It is communication that conceals the identity of the source or the purpose of the message, and in doing so manipulates rather than persuades.

- **Propaganda** insists on a message that is intended primarily to serve the interests of the messenger. It can also be defined as the spreading of information in order to influence public opinion and to manipulate other people's beliefs.
- Propaganda can also be viewed as a systematic effort to persuade. The issue here is not the truth or the falsehood of what is said. The propagandist sends a one-sided message, emphasising the qualities of one side and the weaknesses of the other.

History

- Propaganda did not always have a bad reputation. The word itself is related to *propagate*, meaning “to grow” or “to publicize.” As a synonym for persuasive communication, it grew out the name of Catholic Church’s 17th-century missionary activity, the Congregatio de Propaganda Fide (Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith).

- From 1933 to 1945 the Nazi Government of Germany, was also very adept of propaganda. In order to get power, Adolf Hitler used his orator's ability to tell each audience what they wanted to hear. After his party got into office he installed Joseph Goebbels as head of the Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda. In that capacity Goebbels controlled everything, from the press and radio to theatres and films, music, literature and fine arts. He obtained mass support for the war by drawing parallels with historical events and by emphasising the Nazi concept of Germany's destiny and racial superiority.

- Until the early 1900s, the term was commonly used to mean information, promotion and persuasion. In the popular mind, the word came to be associated with deceptive communication efforts, stemming from the Nazi propaganda bureau of the 1930s, and more recently with the Cold War disinformation campaigns of the 1950s and '60s, which used news as a weapon to discredit and deceive.

TYPES OF PROPAGANDA



Black propaganda (Covert)

- Black propaganda was usually defined as involving deliberate and strategic transmission of lies—its use was well illustrated by the Nazis. According to Howard Becker, a sociologist who worked as an Office of Strategic Services propagandist during World War II, black propaganda always misrepresented the source of the message so that it appeared to come from an “inside,” trustworthy source with whom its target had a close relationship.
- Deliberately propagated rumors or gossip would fit this definition.

White propaganda (Overt)

- It is usually defined as involving intentional suppression of contradictory information and ideas, combined with deliberate promotion of highly consistent information or ideas that support the objectives of the propagandist.
- Sometimes white propaganda was used to draw attention away from problematic events or to provide interpretations of events that were useful for the propagandist. Becker asserts that to be white propaganda, it must be openly identified as coming from an “outside” source—one that doesn’t have a close relationship to the target of the propaganda.

Grey propaganda (unidentified)

- Grey propaganda involved transmission of information or ideas that might or might not be false. The propagandist simply made no effort to determine their validity and actually avoided doing so—especially if dissemination of the content would serve his or her interest.
- Gray propaganda is information that's really on the other end of the spectrum. It's propaganda that might seem like it's presenting legitimate arguments that don't have any sort of agenda behind them, but the origins of the information (or even the names of the groups releasing it) are almost never properly sourced. A source might be noted occasionally, but it's often ultimately untrue.

PR and Propaganda

- The task of PR is to create a positive image of an individual or institution for the public. The image is not necessarily false, but flaws and faults are omitted, ignored or played down. From this point of view, PR is not different from propaganda, which can also contain true facts. A candidate for office who insists he is the best for the job may prove it after winning the election.
- As a matter of fact, Sergei Chakotin divides propaganda into two categories – black and white – stating that public relations include white propaganda, which is the kind that omits false information and has a known source.

- The real difference comes from the fact that propaganda intentionally omits personal flaws and faults, exaggerating positive aspects of self image, on the one hand, using half-truths or outright lies about opponents, i.e. willingly promoting a negative image for adversaries, on the other.
- “Tell a lie once and it will remain a lie. Tell a lie a million times, using all means necessary, and it will become an indisputable truth”, would say cynically Joseph Goebbels.



*TACTICS OF PERSUASION
OR PROPAGANDA*

Public relations writers should be careful with the following writing techniques, which easily can degenerate into oversimplification and deception. What follows is a common listing for persuasive tactics that also can become tools of propaganda. Each tactic raises ethical issues for public relations writers. The first four tactics—plain folks, testimonial, bandwagon and transfer — often are used by

public relations writers. ■

1. Plain Folks

The technique of *plain folk appeals* tries to convince the audience that the message source is unsophisticated, average—just like you and me. It has been used by everybody from Abraham Lincoln to Adolph Hitler. The ethical public relations writer will be satisfied that the impression is accurate.

2. Testimonials

Testimonials involve the supportive words or images of a well known and supposed expert. Social causes use celebrities such as Shahid Afridi for Polio vaccination campaign and Pink ribbon campaign for cancer. The ethical public relations writer will ask several questions: Does the so-called expert really have a particular knowledge of the subject? Has the expert actually used the product or supported the cause? Is the testimony paid for? Is the testimony legitimate?

3. *Bandwagons*

Parades are led by *bandwagons* that get the ambivalent crowds revved up and raring to go. As a communication technique, it presents the suggestion that “Everyone else is doing it, so why not you? Don’t be the last kid on the block to buy this, wear that, smoke this, drink that.” The ethical public relations writer will ask if the momentum is beneficial and warranted.

4. *Transfer*

The *transfer* technique associates a respected symbol for something else. We wrap the nation’s flag around an idea and then appeal to the public’s patriotism, or we try to identify our cause with symbols of godliness or goodness, purity or political correctness. The ethical public relations writer will avoid associations that are questionable exaggerations.

The remaining techniques—card stacking, glittering generalities, and name calling—are less frequently used for legitimate public relations purposes because they create ethical problems in most situations. Public relations writers often find they must expend energy and resources fighting against those techniques that have been turned against their organizations.

5. *Card Stacking*

Card stacking involves giving only one side of the story or deliberately misrepresenting the other side. The ethical public relations writer will question if the case can be made while admitting that the issue is a complex one with various legitimate points of view.

6. *Glittering Generalities.*

Glittering generalities are attempts to hide behind vague concepts that nobody could oppose. Politicians picture themselves as patriotic, clergy as godly, doctors as caring. Everyone is for peace, happiness and freedom. But sometimes such generalities take the place of specifics. The ethical public relations writer will provide specific examples and details on which a public can make informed decisions.

7. *Name Calling.*

The technique of *name calling* is the opposite of the transfer technique. It involves creating scapegoats by associating opponents with unsavory people or ideas, rendering them equally reprehensible. The ethical public relations writer will let the facts speak for themselves without unfairly demeaning people on the other side of the argument.