

“Managed” information, propaganda, post-truth: A socio-political approach



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The “managed” information society

- Information is a reference point for contemporary (post)-modern societies
- Among the most important characteristics of the 20th century is the intensification of persuasion efforts, due to the modernization of politics, (generalization of political participation)
- Information management is part of perception management. Perception management includes the -aligned with specific interests- attempt to influence the public opinion and the adoption of the influence tactics to the rationale of media used to disseminate the pre-managed information.
- Under this scope, information becomes a specific means of (re)orientation of power structures, a means for constructing reality.

Describing propaganda

- In an age of managed information, hence of propaganda, our actions should aim to recognize propaganda for what it actually is: a form of communication and part of our everyday life.
- The interests implementing propagandistic strategies may agree or disagree with ours.
- Therefore, propaganda has to do with “sides” as well. The information we believe in is education; the information we don’t believe in is propaganda”.
- Propaganda is based on four interacting characteristics: 1. the attempt to influence peoples’ minds and behavior, 2. the efficient use of mass media, 3. the understanding of the psychological condition of the pursuees and 4. the exploitation of socially established behavioral patterns.

Defining propaganda

- Lexical definition: promotion of specific ideas
- Persuasive definition: Lies, deceit, manipulation, mind control and brainwash have been long considered synonyms to propaganda
- Denotative definition: a rational, deliberate, mainly political, communication process, exercised through the dissemination of managed information via the mass media
- Propagandistic communication strategies take advantage of communication environments to spread their doctrines and influence as many people as possible

Propaganda characteristics

- Lies and the deliberate construction and dissemination of specific - usually unilateral- information.
- The use of exaggeration aiming at the distortion of either positive or negative (for the propagandist) information.
- The direct or indirect evocation to feelings (e.g. fear or desire).
- The use of rhetoric frames to promote generic notions (e.g. trust, discredibility) and to organize the meaning and values in ways that favor the scopes of the propagandist

Propaganda, post-truth (new [media] propaganda): Similarities and...similarities (the initiation of public debate)

- The triggering event in the beginning of the 20th century was the communication policy of POTUS Wilson concerning WWI.
- Nowadays the communication strategies of D. Trump before and after his election as POTUS and the BREXIT campaign are the main reasons behind the extensive public discussion on post-truth.

Propaganda, post-truth (new [media] propaganda): Similarities and...similarities (as strategy)

- “Relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief”.
- Post-truth journalism: articles-assemblage of facts, information, rumors, statements, rumors of statements, officials’ estimations and predictions of future.
- Post-truth politics: Feelings, not facts, are what matters.
- An attempt to influence public opinion, through the use of specific discursive practices -opinions over facts, emotions over rationalism, half-truth or even lies (e.g. fake news) instead of research, rumors instead of cross-checked information.

Propaganda, post-truth (new [media] propaganda): Similarities and...similarities (as notion/approach)

- Just like propaganda, post-truth as a term incorporates an inherent negativism, due to its emergence in the public sphere after the propagandistic campaigns of Trump and BREXIT political representatives (persuasive definition).
- The very use of the term post-truth -just like its predecessor, propaganda- has been propagandistic.
- We should bear in mind that the term propaganda and its contemporary equivalent, post-truth, denote the fight of ideologically different sides for the hearts and minds of the people

Comparative presentation of key aspects of propaganda and post-truth

	Propaganda	Post-truth
Definition	Deliberate, mainly political, communication process, exercised through the dissemination of managed information. Seeks to influence views, opinions and behaviors	Objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief
Communication environment	Unilateral mass communication/ interactive communication	Unilateral mass communication/ mainly interactive communication
Main aim	Public opinion influence	Public opinion influence
Discursive Characteristics	Emotion Personal opinions/beliefs Lies and the deliberate construction and dissemination of specific -unilateral- information	Emotion, Personal opinions/beliefs fake news
Approaches to the notion (+/-/0)	Predominantly negative	Negative

The differences in the communication field (the analogies of the propagandistic ingredients have changed)

- Atomized (social and communication) context (in post-modernity)
- Increased expression of personal subjective opinions, increased amount of subjective interpretation.
- The news “apparatus” includes nowadays literally millions of channels, websites, social media feeds, in addition to the golden age network news channels and national newspapers.
- In cyberspace the same technology both corrodes and promotes honesty. Those who use cyber-tools to deceive others are always at risk of being exposed by the same tools they use to deceive (rise of fact-checking).

Post-truth in anti-Europeanism

- The EU is a conspiracy of the capitalists to drain the people of the member states.
- Neglects that more than one third of the EU's budget is devoted to policies, which aims to remove economic, social and territorial disparities across the EU, restructure declining industrial areas and diversify rural areas which have declining agriculture.
- The objective of a united Europe is the cultural grinding of its people.
- How can this, however, be the case, when a central pillar of European decision-making and legislation is the principle of subsidiarity.

Post-truth causes in contemporary environment

- Populism, as the moral way of imagining politics along the lines of pitting a homogeneous morally politically correct people against the homogenous morally politically corrupt elite (Manichean rationale/form of propaganda)
- The shift in the communication culture, with politicians using technology to communicate directly with their followers, with no need to transmit their claims through the fact-checking filter of a news organization
- The condition of the news publishing-broadcasting industry (quantity over quality, "viral" stories over journalistic research, speed over information crosschecking)

Post-truth diachronic factors

- There is nothing new in misinformation. Governments, organizations and individuals have always used it – and people often want to believe in stories that reinforce their worldview.
- The phenomenon of the rejection of facts in favour of emotion is also a consequence of the marketization of education and the privatization of the public sphere.