

## PART I. LESSONS

### Mind Over Media: Analyzing Contemporary Propaganda

*This workshop explores what the complex role of propaganda in contemporary society. In a series of three lessons, participants gain knowledge and activate critical thinking, creativity and deepen their sense of social responsibility. This curriculum can be used with or without access to digital technology and Internet access.*

**Room set-up needs:** Projection screen, projector & laptop tech, seats in semi-circle with ability to move into groups in various areas of the room

**Materials needed:** Access videos, PPT slides and print handouts for this session at [www.mindovermedia.eu](http://www.mindovermedia.eu) under For Teachers

**Target Audiences:** youth, parents, teachers age 11 and up

**Key Themes:** media literacy; digital literacy; propaganda; disinformation; consumer culture; advertising and marketing; public relations; public service messages

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#### LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Participants will:

- recognize that propaganda is defined in different ways depending on the culture, time period and the context
- understand that propaganda activates strong emotions, simplifies ideas, appeals to audience needs and values, and targets opponents
- develop a sense of social responsibility for the appropriate sharing of propaganda
- increase their confidence in expressing their views and in participating in discussions of controversial topics where people have differences of opinion
- reflect on propaganda's potentially beneficial or harmful nature and impact on individuals and society

#### MIND OVER MEDIA | WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES

*Set the stage by playing the introductory video for Mind Over Media, located at [www.mindovermedia.eu](http://www.mindovermedia.eu). Then use this sequence of activities to stimulate discussion and dialogue. Each lesson is designed for a 35-minute period.*

#### LESSON 1. DEFINING PROPAGANDA

- A. Print out, display and read aloud the definitions of propaganda located under the “Learn” tab at the Mind Over Media website. Click here to access the worksheet.
- B. Participants work with a partners to pair-share ideas. They review the definitions and discuss: Which elements in the definition do you like best? Then they share ideas with the large group.
- C. Notice that the definitions come from different time periods and cultures. Discuss: Why might the definitions of propaganda change over time?
- D. Review this definition of propaganda:
  - a. Propaganda appears in a variety of forms
  - b. Propaganda is strategic and intentional
  - c. Propaganda aims to influence attitudes, opinions and behaviors
  - d. Propaganda can be beneficial or harmful
  - e. Propaganda may use truth, half-truths or lies
  - f. To be successful, propaganda taps into our deepest values, fears, hopes and dreams
- E. Activity: Create a custom definition of propaganda using elements from the definitions to express your personal understanding of the concept as it is relevant to the 21st century.
- F. Take-away message: Propaganda is defined in different ways but it has always been an important part of contemporary society and it continues to have relevance today.

## LESSON 2. CLOSE ANALYSIS OF PROPAGANDA: RECOGNIZING TECHNIQUES

- A. Propaganda can be distinguished from other forms and genres of communication by some distinctive properties. At the Mind Over Media website, open the tab labeled “Propaganda Techniques.” Click here to access the worksheet. Review together the four techniques of propaganda:
  - a) evokes strong emotion
  - b) appeals to audience needs
  - c) simplifies information and ideas
  - d) attacks opponents
- B. Then select an example of contemporary propaganda from the Mind Over Media website gallery and view it together. Partners work together to identify how the example may use one or more of the four techniques of propaganda. After time for pair-share discussion, ideas are shared as a large group.
- C. Discuss: Which of these four techniques is potentially most powerful? Which is most dangerous? Why? Invite participants to use evidence and reasoning to explain their ideas.
- D. Take-away message: Propaganda evokes strong emotions, appeals to audience needs, simplifies information and ideas, and attacks opponents. These four techniques can bypass the critical thinking that is necessary to analyze these powerful forms of persuasion. That’s why recognizing propaganda techniques can be an important first step in developing critical thinking about media messages.

## LESSON 3. TO SHARE OR NOT TO SHARE

- A. Introduce the idea that more propaganda is spread virally by individuals than by one-way transmissions from newspapers, broadcasters, governments or advertisers. Today, “liking” and sharing a social media post is a powerful way to influence the people in our social networks.
- B. How do we decide whether “to share or not to share”? First, we review the message, understand it, and reflect on its value. Then we consider whether or not the people in our social network might value it, too. Then we make a decision to share or not to share.
- C. Activity: At the Mind Over Media website, open the tab labeled “Rate.” You are presented with a random example of propaganda. Then, working with a partner, spend 20 minutes reviewing examples. For each example, provide a rating on the “beneficial-to-harmful” scale and review how others have evaluated it. If there are comments, read them over. Discuss: Would you share this example with your social network? Why or why not?
- D. Participants describe examples of propaganda that they would feel comfortable sharing with their social networks and examples that they would never share. Discuss: What patterns are evident in the choices people make?
- E. Activity: Select one example to view or display. After looking, viewing or reading it, discuss: Is this example of propaganda beneficial or harmful? Ask participants to indicate their view by putting their fingers in the air to represent their perceptions. If they believe the propaganda is beneficial, they raise 5 fingers. If they believe the propaganda is harmful, they raise 1 finger. Invite people to share their reasons.
- F. Take-away message: It’s important to evaluate propaganda by considering its social benefits and potential harms. Media messages can influence people’s attitudes, knowledge, beliefs and values. Some propaganda can be interpreted as beneficial and other propaganda is considered harmful. But because we interpret media messages differently, people don’t always have the same interpretations about whether a particular example is beneficial or harmful.

## KEEP LEARNING | PART II CURRICULUM

### LESSON 4. WHERE PROPAGANDA CAN BE FOUND

### LESSON 5. SPONSORED CONTENT AS PROPAGANDA

### LESSON 6. USING THE MEDIA LITERACY SMARTPHONE TO ANALYZE PROPAGANDA

Click here to access Part II

## TAKING IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL | ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

After you have explored Mind Over Media ([www.mindovermedia.eu](http://www.mindovermedia.eu)), select from the following resources to complement the workshop and inspire further discussion or programming.

### ARTICLES

European Parliament (2015). At A Glance: Understanding Propaganda and Disinformation. <http://bit.ly/2K6z39v>

### BOOKS

Roberts-Miller, Patricia (2017). *Demagoguery and Democracy*. New York: The Experiment. Explores the rhetorical strategies used by political leaders who promote populism that can divide and damage democracies.

Holiday, Ryan (2012). *Trust Me, I'm Lying*. New York: Penguin. This book explains how online marketing is used in ethically questionable ways to influence public opinion.

Luckert, Steven and Bachrach, Susan (2009). *The State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda*. New York: W.W. Norton. This is the definitive guide to Hitler's use of propaganda as a political candidate, as a dictator, and for war and mass murder.

### FILMS

*The Propaganda Game* (2015). This documentary by Alvaro Longoria shows examples of propaganda in North Korea.

*The Century of the Self* (2002). This British documentary series by Adam Curtis explores the work of Sigmund Freud and Edward Bernays in developing powerful ideas about how to use human nature to control and shape public opinion.

*Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media* (1993). Canadian filmmakers Mark Achbar and Peter Wintonick follow Professor Noam Chomsky as he promotes his book, *Manufacturing Consent*, explaining how media controls public opinion.

### VIDEOS

*Reality Show President: Inside the White House PR Machine*. A 12-minute film on how presidents shape their public image through photography and media representation. Available: <https://youtu.be/1WrZKgTNE0g>

*7 Propaganda Techniques Used on You Everyday*. From How Stuff Works, this video introduces techniques like name calling, glittering generalities, testimonials, institutional transfer, bandwagon, plain folks and more. <https://youtu.be/q8R9MDt4jEc>

*Meet Edward Bernays, Master of Propaganda*. From Corbett Report Extras, this video introduces the work of Edward Bernays, who understood the social benefits of propaganda as a means to advance consumer culture and democracy. <https://youtu.be/44I3pMouCnM>



## Defining Contemporary Propaganda

Neil Postman once wrote that of all the words we use to talk about talk, the word “propaganda” is the most mischievous. That’s because the word has a wide variety of definitions. Use the Learn tab at the Mind Over Media ([www.mindovermedia.eu](http://www.mindovermedia.eu)) and review propaganda definitions. Then identify which ideas are most relevant to your experience. After discussing the definitions, write your own personal one-sentence definition of propaganda on the back of this page.

- 1. Propaganda** is one means by which large numbers of people are induced to act together.  
-Bruce Lannes Smith and Harold Lasswell, authors of *Propaganda, Communication and Public Opinion*, 1946
- 2. Propaganda** is a form of information that panders to our insecurities and anxieties.  
-Jacques Ellul, author of *Propaganda: The Formation of Men’s Attitudes*, 1962
- 3. Propaganda** is the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist.  
-Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, authors of *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 1986
- 4. Propaganda** is intentionally-designed communication that invites us to respond emotionally, immediately, and in a either-or manner.  
-Neil Postman, author of *Technopoly*, 1994
- 5. Propaganda** is a form of purposeful persuasion that attempts to influence the emotions, attitudes, opinions, and actions of specified target audiences for ideological, political or commercial purposes through the controlled transmission of one-sided messages (which may or may not be factual) via mass and direct media channels.  
-Richard Alan Nelson, author of *A Chronology and Glossary of Propaganda in the United States*, 1996
- 6. Propaganda** is indifferent to truth and truthfulness, knowledge and understanding; it is a form of strategic communication that uses any means to accomplish its ends.  
-Walter Cunningham, author of *The Idea of Propaganda*, 2002
- 7. Propaganda** is a form of communication aimed towards influencing the attitude of a population toward some cause or position.  
-Wikipedia, entry on *propaganda*, 2008
- 8. Propaganda** appears in a variety of forms. It is strategic and intentional as it aims to influence attitudes, opinions and behaviors. Propaganda can be beneficial or harmful. It may use truth, half-truths or lies. To be successful, propaganda taps into our deepest values, fears, hopes and dreams  
-Steven Luckert and Susan Bachrach, authors of *The State of Deception*, 2009



## Recognizing Propaganda

Propaganda appears in a variety of forms but four common techniques make it easy to spot. To successfully influence people, propaganda activates strong emotions, simplifies information & ideas, responds to audience needs & values, and attacks opponents. After reading about these four techniques below, visit the Mind Over Media website ([www.mindovermedia.eu](http://www.mindovermedia.eu)) and search for examples of propaganda that use these different techniques. Then discuss: Which of these four techniques is potentially most powerful? Which is most dangerous? Why?

### Technique 1: Activate Strong Emotions

Propaganda plays on human emotions—fear, hope, anger, frustration, sympathy—to direct audiences toward the desired goal. In the deepest sense, propaganda is a mind game—the skillful propagandist exploits people’s fears and prejudices. Successful propagandists understand how to psychologically tailor messages to people’s emotions in order to create a sense of excitement and arousal that suppresses critical thinking. By activating emotions, the recipient is emotionally moved by the message of the propagandist. Labeling is another weapon of choice for the propagandist. What emotions are important for those who create propaganda? Fear, pity, anger, arousal, compassion, hatred, resentment - all these emotions can be intensified by using the right labels.



### Technique 2: Simplify Information & Ideas

Propaganda may use accurate and truthful information, or half-truths, opinions, lies and falsehoods. Successful propaganda tells simple stories that are familiar and trusted, often using metaphors, imagery and repetition to make them seem natural or "true." Oversimplification is effective when catchy and memorable short phrases become a substitute for critical thinking. Oversimplifying information does not contribute to knowledge or understanding, but because people naturally seek to reduce complexity, this form of propaganda can be effective.

## Recognizing Propaganda

### Technique 3: Respond to Audience Needs & Values

Effective propaganda conveys messages, themes, and language that appeal directly, and many times exclusively, to specific and distinct groups within a population. Propagandists may appeal to you as a member of a family, or your racial or ethnic identity, or even your hobbies, your favorite celebrities, your beliefs and values, or even your personal aspirations and hopes for the future. Sometimes, universal values are activated, as when our deepest human values—the need to love and be loved, to feel a sense of belonging and a sense of place—are activated by propaganda. By creating messages that appeal directly to the needs, hopes, and fears of specific groups, propaganda becomes personal and relevant. When messages are personally relevant, people pay attention and absorb key information and ideas.



### Technique 4: Attack Opponents



Propaganda can serve as a form of political and social warfare to identify and vilify opponents. It can call into question the legitimacy, credibility, accuracy, and even the character of one's opponents and their ideas. Because people are naturally attracted to conflict, a propagandist can make strategic use of controversy to get attention. Attacking opponents also encourages "either-or" or "us-them" thinking which suppresses the consideration of more complex information and ideas. Propaganda can also be used to discredit individuals, destroy their reputation, exclude specific groups of people, incite hatred or cultivate indifference.

## To Share or Not to Share

After learning about virality, explore some examples of propaganda at the Mind Over Media website ([www.mindovermedia.eu](http://www.mindovermedia.eu)) to understand how viral media activates strong emotions that encourage people to freely participate in the marketing and promotion process.



Viral marketing is a promotional strategy in which audience participation and interaction is activated to intentionally spread a message.

New forms of propaganda use strong emotions and surprising or unconventional content to inspire people to share content with others. Today, many people “like” or share a message after only a quick scan of the headline and image. They may choose to share content because it may be pleasurable or give them status among their social networks. But when people share content without first reading or viewing it, they can contribute to the spread of propaganda. We should “think before we share.”

**Activity:** Working with a partner, visit the Mind Over Media website ([www.mindovermedia.eu](http://www.mindovermedia.eu)) and use the “Rate” tab to access examples of propaganda. Then complete the two tasks b

Find an example of content on the Mind Over Media Website that you would be VERY willing to share with your social network.

Find an example of content on the Mind Over Media Website that you would NOT willing to share with your social network.