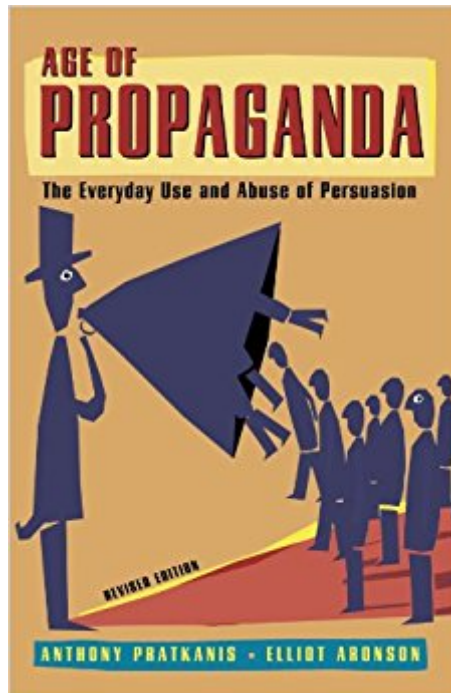


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# Age Of Propaganda: The Everyday Use And Abuse Of Persuasion



## Synopsis

Americans create 57% of the world's advertising while representing only 6% of its population; half of our waking hours are spent immersed in the mass media. Persuasion has always been integral to the democratic process, but increasingly, thoughtful discussion is being replaced with simplistic soundbites and manipulative messages. Drawing on the history of propaganda as well as on contemporary research in social psychology, *Age of Propaganda* shows how the tactics used by political campaigners, sales agents, advertisers, televangelists, demagogues, and others often take advantage of our emotions by appealing to our deepest fears and most irrational hopes, creating a distorted vision of the world we live in. This revised and updated edition includes coverage of the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal, recent election campaigns, talk radio, teen suicide, U.F.O. abductions, the Columbine shootings, and novel propaganda tactics based on hypocrisy and false allegations.

## Book Information

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Peoples' data-processing capabilities are limited. In the information-dense world people are unable to critically review all the information they receive. In order to be adequate to the situation, they resort to so-called heuristics, simple cues or rules for solving the problem. Heuristics are based on peoples' previous experience in similar situations. Although relying on heuristics is sometimes a useful way of dealing with the onslaught of the decision-rich environment, basing our decisions primarily on heuristics can present some problems. First, heuristic cues that we possess may be

false. Furthermore, a rule may be appropriate in certain situations but be misapplied in others. Another serious problem is that heuristics can be easily faked and manipulated. Knowledge of heuristics enables propagandists to control peoples' course of action. The authors did a research of propaganda techniques and set four stratagems of persuasion: 1. You create favorable climate for the message (called pre-persuasion). You subtly outline what picture has to be drawn in the end. Here you decide what way thoughts and perceptions of the audience will be shaped and channeled. Having established right basis for further discourse you secure the results you seek. At this stage you should identify some statements as axioms, i.e. 'what everyone takes for granted' and 'what everyone knows'. You attribute labels (positive or negative) to objects of further discussion, put black-or-white colors in non-disputable way. You use generalities to depict the situation - they are usually so ambiguous that you may change their meanings in the future. You use rumors and gossips. 2. You create a 'source credibility', i.e. establish a favorable image in the eyes of the audience.

If you want advice on how to be an effective and honest communicator, Anthony Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson have written an entire book about it, *Age of Propaganda: the everyday use and abuse of persuasion* (265 pages. W.H. Freeman and Company). Pratkanis and Aronson give their own accounts of how propaganda impacted their childhood. Aronson recalls how he felt about the "evil Germans" and "sneaky Japanese" while growing up in the 1940s. Pratkanis lost his naïveté when the Watergate scandal broke. He would later come to the realization that all politicians lie and cheat. The two authors attempt to educate the reader regarding propaganda and persuasion. Their goal is have the reader able to identify devices used, what makes them effective, and how to counteract their effectiveness without becoming a pessimist. All the chapters were enlightening; some stood out more than others and were able to give good "heads up" advice. The authors give the reader the inside track on how advertisers promote their products, a "buyer beware" sort of infomercial. Companies use words such as new, quick, easy, improved, now, suddenly, amazing, and introducing to sell their products. The authors further expose merchants by explaining how they make certain brands more accessible than others by placing them at eye level. Additionally, the consumer is informed that ads using animals, babies, or sex sell the product more successfully than advertisers that use cartoons or historical figures. The buyer is also cautioned on how merchants place products at the end of a supermarket aisle or near the checkout aisle; this strategy catches the consumer's eye and lures them into the "I gotta have it, can't live without it" frame of mind.

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