



Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion

Anthony R. Pratkanis , Elliot Aronson

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Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion Anthony R. Pratkanis , Elliot Aronson 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.

Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion Details

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From Reader Review Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion for online ebook

Michelle says

This is an enlightening book. We all get trapped by the misuse and abuse of persuasion sometimes. This helps identify it and understand why we are so influenced by people.

Nessy Dimitrova says

I read this book thanks to Blinkist.

The key message in this book:

Propaganda is all around us, convincing us to spend money on things we don't want, vote for politicians who don't care about us and convince our kids that they need toys that aren't worth the plastic they're made of. Fortunately, we can combat this deception by identifying propaganda's central strategies and understanding how it works.

Suggested further reading:

Mistakes Were Made (But Not by Me) by Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson

Through studies and anecdotes, these blinks explain why, when we make mistakes, we often come up with self-justifications instead of admitting the mistakes to ourselves. It also shows how detrimental these self-justifications can be to personal relationships, medicinal care, the justice system and even international relations.

Ryan says

MY SUMMARY AND NOTES: What You Can Do To Keep From Being Influenced by Propaganda

- Know the ways of persuasion and realize that you personally may be the victim of propaganda. Most people believe that only other people are susceptible to being persuaded and that is when propaganda is best able to get past our defenses.
- Monitor your emotions. If you notice you are having an emotional response to a communication, ask "Why?" Look for things that might induce emotions, such as a false commitment, a "free" gift that makes you feel obligated, a scarce item that induces feelings of inferiority, a we-they distinction that elicits the granfalloon (arbitrary group), or speeches that make you feel fearful or guilty. If you feel that your emotions are being played on, get out of the situation and then analyze what is going on.
- Explore the motivation and credibility of the source of the communication. Ask such things as: "Why is this person telling me this information?" "What does the source have to gain?"

- Think rationally about any proposal or issue. Ask such things as: “What is the issue?” “What labels and terms are used to describe it?” “Are these labels used fairly?”
- Attempt to understand the full range of options before making a decision. Ask such questions as: “why are these choices being presented to me in this manner?”
- Base your evaluation of a leader not on what they say, but on what their actions in the past have shown.
- Stop to consider the possibility that any information you receive may be a factoid. Always ask: “What is the evidence for this?” “Where did you hear it?”
- If the deal looks too good to be true, it probably is. Before making a purchase, look for these common warning signs of a bad deal: 1) the deal is only good for “today”; 2) the seller offers “free gifts” in return for “minimum” effort; 3) a sale item is suddenly unavailable but a “much better” item happens to be available for “slightly more money” (throwing a lowball); 4) the seller emphasizes the amount of each payment rather than the total amount of the sale; 5) a “repair person” discovers a “dangerous” defect in something you own that must be repaired immediately; 6) you are given little or not time to read a contract; 7) the seller makes you feel guilty for asking questions or asks, “Don’t you trust me?”
- Teach your children about propaganda. Watch TV with your children and help them develop counterarguments against propaganda.
- Support efforts to protect vulnerable groups such as children from exploitative persuasion.
- Avoid being dependent on a single source of information. One of the hallmarks of intense propaganda is centralized communications from a single perspective.
- Think of the news as the news and try to separate it in your own mind from entertainment.
- Support campaign spending reform. Instead of letting candidates spend taxpayer allotted dollars on 30-second ads, why not require recipients of federal matching funds to use the money to pay for debates, open forums with the public, press conferences, and infomercials that give the viewer a chance to hear the candidate’s position in detail.
- Demand consumer affairs shows, or talk shows that bring together advertisers, media critics, and consumers to discuss advertising.
- Write companies asking for proof of advertised claims.
- Support and extend efforts to squelch deceptive advertisements. Also support efforts to eliminate misleading labels and other deceptive practices.
- Promote the institutions of democracy. We often take for granted the nature of democracy, thinking that is it just “majority rule” or “the freedom to do our own thing.” A democracy is a pattern of social relations that encourages deliberative persuasion (not propaganda) and respects the rights and responsibilities of all citizens. The hallmarks of a democracy (as opposed to an autocracy) include the following: 1) Communication is decentralized, with multiple sources of information; 2) authority and power are constrained by a system of checks and balances; 3) agendas and goals are established through discussion, not be leader fiat; 4) there is a reciprocity of influence between leaders and citizens, as opposed to unidirectional influence from elites; 5) group boundaries and roles are flexible, as opposed to there being a rigid social structure; and 6) minority opinion is encouraged as a means of obtaining a better decision, and the rights of those in the minority are protected.

Pratkanis, A.R., & Aronson, E. (2001). Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion, 2nd ed.

Devra Doiron says

One of the most useful books I've read. As other reviewers have pointed out, it's tediously long and could probably have been shortened considerably without losing substance, but I guess that's to be expected when the authors are academics. I'm giving it four stars anyway because it's lessons are needed even more today than when it was originally published in 1992. Anyone trying to sift through the avalanche of "fake news" will find useful advice in this book.

Unlike many sources which illuminate the problem without offering a solution, the penultimate chapter offers valuable tips. Two examples:

1. Know the ways of persuasion and realize that your own opinions may be a result of propaganda.
2. Always ask yourself, "What are the arguments for the other side?" (Imagine the good it would do in our increasingly polarized societies if people applied this critical thinking skill instead of living in a so-called "echo chamber.")

My favorite passage in the book:

"Recall that our age of propaganda is message-dense; few citizens have the time, the opportunity or the capacity to process the vast array of information they receive. Further, as we have seen, news is frequently watched not so much for its information value as for its ability to entertain. This increases the temptation of communicators to manipulate beliefs and opinions not by reason but by appeals to emotions and simplistic thought. Communicators seem to be relying more and more on persuasion devices that make use of prejudices and emotions over fully informed discussion, vivid images over thoughtful discourse, meaningless association over reasoned causal analyses.

The consequences for democracy can be dire. As more and more propagandists use simplistic persuasion, the competitive urge to use simpler and simpler persuasion devices increases. As simpler and simpler persuasion devices are used, people become increasingly less informed and sophisticated about civic matters. As the populace becomes less informed, the propagandist must use even more simplistic persuasion devices. The result is an ignorance spiral--a cynical populace bombarded with more and more thoughtless propaganda that they have less and less skill and inclination to process and ability to understand."

Nana says

I bought this book after Ramit Sethi's recommendation on the Tim Ferris podcast. I didn't know much going in, so it was a surprising read.

This book promises to help you identify all the forms of persuasion and also teach you tactics to respond or counteract various forms of persuasion. Is this promise realized? That is hard to say. The book does a great job of identifying the various forms and persuasion and the 4 persuasion phases: pre-persuasion, communicator credibility, message delivery and emotional appeals. All 4 phases were fascinating in their own way. Frankly, I was not always impressed by the tons of researched shared by the authors, since I had

come across them over and over again in other books. For example, using Jim Jones is a terrific albeit overused example of a religious charlatan, especially without a compelling or fresh perspective. I have also heard of the story where subliminal messaging in an movie theater led some patrons to feel hungry and crave coke or popcorn. Sales increased by a huge percentage.

The book closes by sharing ways to avoid malicious types of persuasion:

1. Know the different forms of persuasion and know you if you are susceptible to them. Spoiler alert - you probably are susceptible to various forms of persuasion.
2. Whenever a deal looks too good to be true, it probably is; inquire insistently to confirm your thoughts - positive or otherwise.
3. Regularly look at both sides of the coin. If you had a representative from the other side, what would they say?
4. Teach your children about propaganda, and find ways to further inoculate them. Interesting ways of doing so are helping them understand the key differences between what is advertised and what the product actually offers. Oftentimes there is a discrepancy.
5. Be a staunch supporter of efforts to curtail persuasion towards groups more susceptible to it. Children, are a good example.
6. Avoid getting your information from just one source. For example, do not get all your news from MSNBC, or worse, FOX NEWS. :)
7. News can sometimes be dry and boring. See it as such. Expectations for news programs should be much different from what you get from an action packed thriller with Tom Cruise as the protagonist.
8. Pay attention to the communication style of the people you interact with. It's often very telling.
9. Demand TV shows that bring together marketers, customers, and businesses to discuss the unfair practices of persuasion pertaining to advertising.

Let me discuss the four phases briefly:

Pre-persuasion: This involves setting the stage for your persuasion; mainly context.

Communicator credibility: This speaks to the manufactured or real credibility of the person delivering the message.

How the message is delivered: This focuses on the different techniques such as packaging, self-selling, repetition, singing (distraction), one-sided vs. two-sided debate.

Emotional appeals: This speaks to how individuals receive the messages. There are several tactics here.

Fear. Used optimally, it could force an individual to change significantly. You must ensure that the fear you instill is not one where the individual feels helpless, or feels they can not do anything about it. The fear induced must be substantial and also provide action items to help one get out of such fear.

Granfallon technique: Association by anything at all. This is where when you meet someone or you are trying to persuade someone, you find as many similarities between you two.

Me: "You went to UVA?"

Me: "OH, so did I."

Me: "You like collard greens?"

You: "Yes"

Me: "Who would have thunk it? We have so much in common."

It is used all the time by sales persons. They start by learning as much from you as they can. And as soon as they can, they use such information against you.

Guilt. Guilt sells! Let someone feel guilty enough about an action, and their guard falls. You are able to persuade them a tad easier.

Reciprocation: Human beings are wired to give back when someone is good to us. That a great way to persuade. When someone does something generous, we feel compelled to do the same for them. It is one way various religions and marketing firms have been able to take advantage of people. The Hare Krishna religion

and the Amway direct selling come to mind.

Committed heart: This is another astute way of persuading. Get folks to commit a little bit at a time. When you do the research on cults and other organizations where their followers committed atrocious acts in the name of religion, you realize they did not get there overnight. They slowly committed themselves. The leader's requests slowly escalates; the current request is usually a tad more ridiculous than the last.

Practice what you preach: Another way to persuade folks is to get them to spread your message, and then turn around and ask them if they applying those principles in their daily lives – booyaaa!

Scarcity: Want to spark interest in something? Tell people it is the only one of its kind.

To wrap this up, I have picked up quite a few techniques. When and if I want to be as persuasive as possible, I need to get a better understanding of the context; situational awareness if you will. I will also have to make sure I am projected in the right light to persuade. Either I am an expert, or I believe passionately in the stance I have taken. Looking the part is key, fit, speaking confidently and becoming an expert in various disciplines.

When it comes to message delivery, this is key as well. The message must be delivered almost as an advert, using the right words, tone, and demeanor. It would also be helpful to repeat key phrases often. Lastly, when it comes to delivery, decide to use the one-sided or two-sided. One-sided works best when the audience is on your side and you could do not wrong. A two-sided argument works best when you are trying to convince folks on the fence. It gives them the impression that you are aware of the arguments against your proposal. I would also need to agree on which emotion to appeal to: fear, granfallon, guilt, reciprocation, step-by-step commitment, leading by example, or scarcity.

Karen says

This book was written in 1991 but is relevant for today. Many of the persuasion techniques and studies I was familiar with, though I did learn some things and took notes. It is good for us to periodically stop and think about all the ways others are trying to manipulate us. Knowledge is power, in this case, and at the end of the book ways to counteract persuasion are given.

Highly recommended.

Stephanie says

Ok, I only skimmed this because it was pretty dense, but it highlighted some very interesting points about propaganda-- I hope to give it a more thorough read someday.

Erik Rostad says

This was the 3rd book about persuasion from this year's list of 52 Books of Titans books. These books used many of the same examples, so by the time I was on this book, I pretty much knew what was coming. This was still a valuable book, but was a little dated. I'm sure if I had only read this book as a book about persuasion (and propaganda), I would have enjoyed it much more. The other two books on persuasion were Mistakes Were Made (but not by me) and The Power of Persuasion.

Fabrizio Stucchi says

This should be a mandatory ready for anybody at High School, it is simply a description of the world we are living, and how we are conditioned by media and advertisement. A MUST READ!

Rebecca says

This book is very dense. I found it was very thought-provoking and highly relevant. As someone experiencing my first US election while in the country, I can identify many of the techniques being used. I would highly recommend this book to anyone interested in critical thinking and free thought.

Anwen Garston says

Everyone should have to read this book. Fascinating

Tiago Soares says

Great book sharing tons of persuasion techniques that are used on a daily basis to make people do what we messenger wants.

It's similar to Influence by Robert Cialdini. A great pick and recommended to those who want to always know more about persuasion.

James Andersen says

My social psychology professor had us read this book, we were told to read 2 chapters and write a summary on the chapters we were assigned, my review is based on this experience. I have to say I am glad I did this assignment because, the information in this book [just from the 2 chapters I read] is something we should all have to read about. The information presented is clear, well-organized, and easily understandable. I intend to finish this book and my review should not deviate much from it, and I highly recommend that the reader considers the points presented in this book so as to know and protect oneself from attempts of being Propagandized and even persuaded when in conversation as well.

Jennifer Whiteside says

This book was very well written and highly readable for a slightly dry subject. It's a must-read for anyone subjected to advertising or political campaigning. The book points out the ways that advertisers and campaigners use emotions, messengers, and information to sway our thinking.

Mark Manderson says

Persuasion is built on rational thought and the weighing of different perspectives.

Propaganda confuses its message in order to disseminate information without people realizing it.

Propaganda uses the peripheral route, which relies on a distracted consumer not being able to concentrate on the real message he's being fed.

Propaganda is all about misleading people, and while it comes in many forms, it's always based on the four stratagems of influence.
