



RHETORICAL DEVICES OF PROPAGANDA

Almost all propaganda shares one element in common: It presents a little true information surrounded by a lot of misleading or untrue information. People see the true information and so may believe that everything the propaganda piece says is also true. Below are some of the rhetorical devices used in propaganda.

- **Fear:** Use fear to convince the audience that if they do not take a particular course of action, like getting home insurance, something bad will happen, like flooding. Example: This was used in the Holocaust as well. The Germans became convinced that the Jews were going to take over the government, and they needed to do something to prevent this from happening.
- **Plain folk:** Using a prominent person to convince the audience that this person and his ideas are “of the people.” Example: Showing an actor buying groceries or paying taxes or showing an important politician eating at a fast food restaurant.
- **Bandwagon:** Conveying to the audience through an advertisement that since everyone is doing it, so should you, or in other words, if it is good enough for the people in the propaganda, it is good enough for you. Example: All of these great people agree that their cause is right and that everyone else is wrong. Who are you to disagree with them?
- **Assertion:** An enthusiastic statement that is presented as fact, but may not actually be true. Examples: If an advertiser claims that their product is the best, but doesn't include any evidence. Stating that people don't have jobs because they are taken by immigrants, even though research proves that immigration creates more jobs.
- **Omission:** Not presenting the whole truth. This leads people to jump to conclusions about the evidence being presented. Example: Showing the hijacked planes hitting the twin towers on 9/11 conveys a message of revenge and anger, but only showing the aftermath conveys a message of sorrow.
- **Half the information:** Convincing the audience to choose one option by presenting it as the best of the worse options. Alternatively, making predictions based on the future that are based only on a few facts or allowing the audience to come to false conclusions by only presenting some facts, but not all of them. Example: There are some real problems in society
- **Glittering generalities:** Linking positive words to highly valued concepts. When these words are used, they demand approval without thinking, simply because such an important concept is involved. For example, when a person is asked to do something in 'defense of democracy' they are more likely to agree. The concept of democracy has a positive connotation to them because it is linked to a concept that they value. Words often used as glittering generalities are honor, glory, love of country, and especially in the United States, freedom.

- **Scapegoating:** Assigning blame to a group or individual, when that group or individual is really not the cause of the problem. This takes away the blame from responsible parties. Example: The Nazis used scapegoating against the Jews. They blamed the Jews for their bad economy.
- **Name-calling:** Challenging an argument or assertion by discrediting the person offering the argument or assertion. By linking the person or idea being attacked to a negative symbol, the propagandist hopes that the audience will reject the person or the idea on the basis of the symbol, instead of looking at the available evidence.

References:

Anti-Defamation League. (2016) Outsmarting Propaganda: Combatting the Lure of Extremist Recruitment Strategies Lesson Plan. <https://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/outsmarting-propaganda-combatting-the-lure-of-extremist>

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