

## 'Propaganda and Persuasion'

Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell,  
(Sage Publications, London, 1999; ISBN 0-7619-1146-4; 430pp; £38)

The study of propaganda is an area of research which has far too few comprehensive works of quality published in it. Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell and their third edition of the book 'Propaganda and Persuasion' are a notable exception. It has become almost the standard text in the area and is certainly the one I would recommend to practitioners with an interest in the subject or for those who wish to study the topic at advanced level.

The third edition has been extensively updated in response to what the authors see as the constant shift in purpose, technology and ideology of propaganda. It has built in quality work from some of the newer studies, notably Hilmer Hoffman's 'The Triumph of Propaganda: Film and National Socialism, 1936-1945',<sup>1</sup> which one cannot help but wonder whether Jodie Foster has read yet as she contemplates her own biopic on one of the great female film makers of the period. It also includes work covering the Gulf War<sup>2,3</sup> and Caroline Page's 'Official Propaganda during the Vietnam War, 1965-1973: The limits of persuasion',<sup>4</sup> and was strengthened by the publication and ideas of the laudable 'Munitions of the Mind: War propaganda from the ancient world to the nuclear age' by Philip Taylor.<sup>5</sup>

The case studies have been strengthened and developed to take account of modern developments and advanced student need. They reflect a diverse and

important set of areas of potential study: women and the war (WW2); the Gulf War; smoking and health and Premarin: a bitter pill to swallow. The authors thus show the operation of the state propaganda machine in two wars and the use of propaganda around health and the tobacco industry and its use in the pharmaceutical business.

The text is set out logically and interspersed with good-quality illustrations, although one must wonder whether Sage cannot upgrade to colour for the inevitable fourth edition, as such posters as Bird's 'Careless Talk Costs Lives' and El Lissitzky's famous propaganda poster 'Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge' certainly lose something in black and white. With recent exhibitions on the evolution of the iconographic poster in the Soviet bloc and the rise of cause advertising, this is clearly an area of potential for brightening up the text.

The structure of the book is a good one. The first chapter offers definitions of the area and outlines how the modern study of propaganda came about after the First World War and led the way to the social scientific study of persuasion. As Doob points out,<sup>6</sup> propaganda as a word became less used and was replaced by such words as communication, information and persuasion because they imply no value judgment and tend to embrace the development of new communication technologies as well as the intricate per-

plexities inherent in developing societies and international diplomacy. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 review the theories and research regarding persuasion and propaganda. Chapter 5 examines the use of propaganda in psychological warfare; then come the emerging fear of propaganda methods of analysis (Chapter 6), the four case studies (Chapter 7) and the process model that depicts how propaganda works in modern society (Chapter 8). It is extensively referenced and draws upon both North American and European literatures, which is both pleasing to see and adds to its comprehensiveness as a text.

Where this text is so good is in its appreciation of propaganda throughout history and society. For instance, as Goebbels described Hitler's propaganda principles, which he had extracted from 'Mein Kampf':

'A carefully built up erection of statements, which whether true or false can be made to undermine quite rigidly held ideas and to construct new ones that will take their place. It would not be impossible to prove with sufficient repetition and psychological understanding of the people concerned that a square is in fact a circle. What after all are a square and a circle? They are mere words and words can be molded until they clothe ideas in disguise.'<sup>6</sup>

This gives insight both into the reality and evil of how propaganda can be used as a powerful communication tool.

The text allows the specialist and stu-

dent to assess the impact of propaganda and its place as part of modern communications. The final chapter presents a model of propaganda and several premises that have evolved from the events, ideas and concepts discussed in earlier chapters. The book is a must have for anybody interested in modern marketing communications work to put it in context and to learn from the past.

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