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What Propaganda is and How People Can Protect Themselves

Introduction

When I was a high school student, I studied about world history. At that time, I learned that the citizens could not access enough information and be controlled by governments during World War I. Also, I knew that propaganda was conducted not only in my country of Japan, but also in other countries. Therefore, I wondered how propaganda was done by who, and that is why I decided to write this paper about this topic. In this essay, I investigate the general information and the cases of propaganda, the area in which propaganda is carried out, the characteristic of a propagandist, and the solution for avoiding the negative effects of propaganda.

In this paper, I would like to provide readers the knowledge of propaganda in detail and suggest the solution to this problem. First, I mention the meanings and aims of propaganda. Second, I focus on the example of propaganda and information manipulation, especially in wartime and in the COVID-19 pandemic. Third, I discuss who manages propaganda in which countries and what carries misinformation. And fourth, I introduce how viewers and media owners can stop promoting propaganda.

Literature Review

There are positive aspects and negative aspects of freedom of speech. According to Justyna Miklazewska's analysis of John Rawls, such speech has a vital role in arguing disapproval of someone or something to improve the situation; therefore, freedom of speech for individuals is a precondition for impartial politics (78). On the other hand, allowing

people to exercise freedom of speech can be dangerous. For example, people who make hate speech can appear especially on social media platforms (Miklazewska 79). Information manipulation can be used to avoid harmful statements, but sometimes doing this can affect citizens adversely and be regarded as propaganda. I will introduce some definitions and purposes of propaganda in the next paragraph.

The Meanings and the Aims of Propaganda

Justyna Miklazewska argues that the definition of propaganda is roughly divided into two categories: The broad meaning is spreading a certain concept in society to promote it (79). Specifically, propaganda means manipulating information “by using media and the tools of communication” to make citizens act in a particular way (Miklazewska 79 par. 4). Additionally, Samantha Bradshaw and Philip N. Howard say there are three aims of propaganda (2). Propaganda is conducted to restrict “fundamental human rights,” to defame political opponents, and to cover political objection up (Bradshaw and Howard 2 “The Co-Option” section par.1).

The Examples of Manipulating Information in Wartime and During COVID-19 Pandemic

According to Casey’s historical account written in 1944, propaganda and counterpropaganda were born because of “Differences on religious and political matters” in the ancient Asiatic civilization (par. 2). The word “propaganda” began to be widely used in Europe when the Catholic church proceeded with their missionary activities (Casey par. 6). World War I was the most significant event for people, which emphasized the effects of propaganda on citizens and politics (Casey par. 9), and that is why many people associated propaganda with the war.

One of the most famous examples is Nazi’s propaganda. The Nazis started to destroy the free press on January 30, 1933, and on October 4 of the same year, Otto Dietrich, the Reich Press Chief, supported the establishment of the Editorial Control Law, which was

restricting journalistic activities of “non-Aryan (Narayanaswami 2 par. 2).” Also, they defined Jews as their enemy and portrayed Jews as ugly people (Narayanaswami 3). At that time, the effective posters drawn by using visual effects like the halo effects and psychological effects, including the bandwagon effects or an us vs. them mentality, helped the admiration of the apotheosis of Hitler (Narayanaswami 2-3). Goebbels, the Nazi propaganda minister, did censorship, and reduced the number of people who can access all of the vital information, and requested to show “unexpurgated reports only to himself (Doob 422 par. 2).”

Manipulation of information was carried out not only in wartime, but also during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is quite common that social media platforms censor the posts if there are unacceptable contents such as hate speech or the promotion of violence (Niemic 1). Major social media platforms, including YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, decided which information related to COVID-19 is correct or not based on the WHO and the local health authorities (Niemic 2). Therefore, they often do censorship and remove the contents that are different from what the WHO or the health authorities say because those are confusing for people (Niemic 2).

Where Propaganda is Managed by Who

In 2019, information manipulation was done in 70 countries, and they used social media as platforms for propaganda. The number of countries which organize information manipulation was 28 in 2017, but it had increased to 48 in 2018, and surprisingly, it had reached 70 countries in 2019 (Bradshaw and Howard 2). Among these, “China, India, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela” was doing “foreign influence operations” with computers (Bradshaw and Howard 2 “A Limited Number” section par. 1). Facebook is used for propaganda the most, in 56 countries, and only eight countries used Instagram for this purpose (Bradshaw and Howard 2-6). One notable thing is media manipulation in China.

The government in China used domestic platforms such as Weibo, WeChat, and QQ for propaganda, however after Hong Kong's democracy movement in 2019, they switched to social media platforms, which are used worldwide (Bradshaw and Howard 2).

There are many cases of propaganda conducted by governments and politicians. Samantha Bradshaw and Philip N. Howard clarified that propaganda was done by government agencies in 44 countries and by politicians and parties in 45 countries (9-10 Table 1). In fact, Adolf Hitler wrote in his book, *Mein Kampf*, that organization needs to find and teach a propagandist, and have to break the existing rule and "make room for the penetration of the new teaching (Narayanaswami 1 "History of Nazi Propaganda" section par, 1-2)." Also, according to Goebbels' diary, propaganda must be conducted by a single centralizing authority (Doob 423). Even in this Internet generation, dictatorship can use the media and the Internet for propaganda or monitoring (Miklazewska 86).

How Citizens Can Avoid the Threat of Propaganda

Viewers can protect their freedom of speech and stop sharing misinformation to avoid promoting propaganda. Miklazewska asserts that "civic education" and "reliable and pluralistic media" are necessary for citizens to ensure their freedom of speech (87 par. 3). Sarkis warns social media users about the danger of spreading misinformation, so when they find suspicious posts or videos and discuss about them on social media, they must not retweet and link them (Sarkis par. 9). In this case, they should take screenshots and paste them into their posts with their comments (Sarkis par. 9). Moreover, Sarkis introduces what staff making programs on television or media can do. They can stop inviting guests who have spread falsehoods before, avoid replaying misinformation "on later news programs," and make news outlets correct a falsehood and declare valid facts (Sarkis par. 6-7).

Conclusion

In conclusion, I discussed how we can cope with propaganda and information

controlling. Firstly, there are two definitions of propaganda, the broad meaning and the specific one (Miklazewska 79). Secondly, I researched propaganda organized by Nazis in wartime, but I found that governments also manipulate information today (Bradshaw and Howard 9; Doob 423; Narayanaswami 1; Niemiec 1). Thirdly, I mentioned 70 countries are using this way to control public opinion, and social media are used frequently (Bradshaw and Howard 2; 6 Figure 4). Moreover, governments or politicians tend to be propagandists in general (Bradshaw and Howard 9 par. 2-4; 10 Table 1). And fourthly, I suggested tips for preventing propaganda from affecting individuals, groups, and countries negatively. I think that propaganda is a non-ethical policy, but if all kinds of information control are banned, the media will be overflowing with harmful statements. Therefore, I would like to recommend that the media regulate the adverse contents to some extent while checking not to control too much among multiple organizations.

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