



Research Report General Assembly 4

Addressing the spread of propaganda
throughout the world

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Introduction

Until the end of the 19th century, the term propaganda was neither negative nor positive. It could be defined as the propagation of a particular doctrine or practise. For example, the spread of certain information by simply using posters or short films. Today, propaganda has implicitly political – and negative – connotations. It is something our opponents use against us.

Propaganda today can be defined as “information, ideas, opinions, or images, often only giving one part of an argument, that are broadcast, published, or in some other way spread with the intention of influencing people's opinions”. There are many ways for governments to influence the opinion of a country's population. For example, through social media particularly in countries such as China, Russia, America and countries in the Middle East.

The Committee

General Assembly 4, mostly referred to as GA4, is one of the four GAs of MUNA 2019. General issues in this committee revolve around special political situations and decolonization. GA4 is a ‘normal committee’. This means that resolutions have to be prepared by each delegate. During the debate we will entertain these resolutions as a whole at once. In order to have your own resolution added to the agenda there have to be at least eight co-submitters, who also want your resolution to be discussed. This does not mean that they have to be in full agreement with the content of the resolution.

In the General Assembly all member states have one vote. A simple majority decides on matters. All General Assemblies together have the function and power to discuss questions relating to international peace; they make recommendations for peace settlements, protect human rights and international economic collaboration to name just a few.

In comparison to other committees, the General Assemblies together participate in the Plenary session. This will take place on the last day of the conference, where with all General Assemblies together several passed resolutions are discussed and voted on.

Overview

With the rise of the internet our world has evolved into a state of what many people would like to call a "global village". The accessibility of platforms on social media has made the world more connected and has brought people closer together than ever before. Therefore, every act of propaganda has the propensity to reach and affect several parts of the world. The global system, moreover, is inexorably changing. As population, trade, travel, education, and technology evolve, new centres of political, cultural, and economic power emerge. This rapid social evolution tends to favour more sophisticated forms of propaganda. Unlike the more simplistic forms of propaganda known in the past, today's world demands the use of propaganda that makes use of technological developments. There are literally thousands of written, audio-visual, and organizational media that a contemporary propagandist might use. It is therefore extremely hard to regulate the use of propaganda and control what is being published.

To simplify the term propaganda, we will differentiate between two kinds. There is rational propaganda, and then there is non-rational propaganda.

Rational propaganda: propaganda in favor of action that is consonant with enlightened self interest. Arguments are backed by facts and logic. For example a poster to commercialize a product in the supermarket.

Non-Rational propaganda: propaganda that is not consonant with anybody's enlightened self interest, dictated by, and plays on people's fear. The kind of propaganda that is one of the

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main characteristics of a totalitarian state. 20th century dictators such as Stalin, Hitler and Mussolini were renowned for using this kind of propaganda.

Despite all the conflict in the past it seems as if rational propaganda, which can still be misleading, but nonetheless is rooted in the language of reason, has become the dominant form of propaganda for political discourse.

However, the 21st century has seen an abrupt rise in conflicts. A global financial crisis, jobs lost to globalization and automation, widening inequality, terrorist attacks, refugees and global warming. This has caused an increase in anxiety amongst the Western population which has resulted in a shift in their political ideologies. This has made way for many unscrupulous populists to appeal to voters' base emotions, making them ignore facts and logic that would normally be obvious to anyone.

What differs between the modern propaganda of 21st century populists and the propaganda of 20th century dictators is that modern populists can use the internet as an effective tool. Methods of 21st century propaganda are listed below:

- **Echo chambers.** Social media and the explosion of choice in news sources has led to people forming like-minded groups. We see far more messages that reinforce our beliefs than challenge them. That is because the platforms through which we find most of what we see online—social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and Weibo and search engines such as Google, Yandex, and Baidu—have business models that require them to maximize the time we spend on them.
- **Alternative news sources.** It is now possible to create large, well-financed operations that pump out news with a powerful agenda and that can reach people across the world. In fact, just one person can become an alternative news source—look at Trump's Twitter account. This proliferation of sources does not just have the effect of overloading people with competing versions of the truth. They can also change the news cycle, determining what gets attention and what does not, forcing other media to chase stories they might otherwise ignore and neglect and choose those they should be paying attention to.
- **Fake news.** Even the most tendentious news sources tend to stop shy of outright falsehood, but some deal in nothing else.
- **Online swarms.** If you have a fiercely loyal base of supporters or can pay them you can mobilize vast groups of people to troll opponents and flood the digital airwaves with your desired message, amplifying it and making it hard to tell how much support it really has.
- **Bots.** Automated social media accounts are also being pressed into service to both amplify messages and quash them. As technology improves they will become ever harder to distinguish from real people.
- **Psychological profiling and targeted advertising.** It has been shown that social media platforms are able to influence people's moods in precise, predictable ways by putting certain words into the posts they see on the platform.

Possible solutions

- Spreading the awareness of the methods that websites use in order to affect their users decisions: by informing internet users about the little tricks websites use in order to influence their visitors, they will be more aware of disinformation given to them on the internet and will be influenced less easily by information on the web.

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- Teaching the youth how to do their fact checking the right way: by teaching the youth from a young age to check their facts gained from the Internet. They will not be influenced as much by mass media.
- Discouraging people to share biased news articles on the Internet. Unconscious familiarity eventually leads to thinking something is true. Accidentally sharing things we did not realize were false is a major component in disinformation campaigns and the virality of conspiracy theories. We too often share things on social media out of a desire to boost our own likes/retweets/follower count, rather than a desire to inform.

Resolution

General Assembly four is a committee in which all delegates have to prepare their resolutions beforehand. A resolution should give an insight as to your country's opinion and its stance on the issue. It should mention possible solutions, and how these solutions can be entertained. A very important note while writing a resolution is that the delegate should only defend its country's own ideologies and not form his or her own perspective and ideas.

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