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PHILOSOPHICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE CONCEPT OF «POLITICAL PROPAGANDA»: BETWEEN POSITIVISM AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

Abstract

A comparison of two main contemporary philosophical approaches to the analysis of “political propaganda” is conducted: positivist and psychoanalytic. The positivist approach, based on the idea of objectivity and observability of phenomena, analyzes political propaganda using empirical methods and statistical data. It seeks to identify patterns and trends in the dissemination and impact of propaganda messages on mass consciousness. On the other hand, the psychoanalytic approach focuses on the unconscious and emotional aspects of political propaganda. It views propaganda techniques as means of subconscious manipulation and psychological control, paying attention to the symbolic and subjective aspects of political communication.

The article analyzes the basic principles of each approach, their theoretical foundations, and methodological tools. Examples from history and contemporary times are provided to illustrate the application of these approaches to the analysis of political propaganda. The strengths and weaknesses of each approach are discussed, as well as their potential for understanding the nature and impact of political propaganda in modern society.

Differences between positivist and psychoanalytic approaches to understanding political propaganda from other contemporary philosophical schools are identified. For instance, from an existentialist perspective, propaganda can be perceived as an attempt to manipulate individual meaning and values, creating an illusion of choice and freedom. Meanwhile, philosophical schools such as Marxism, feminism, and postmodernism also make significant contributions to understanding

political propaganda. For example, Marxist analysis reveals the economic and class aspects of propagandistic messages, while the feminist perspective draws attention to gender aspects of manipulating societal consciousness.

Key words: political propaganda, propaganda, positivism, psychoanalysis, society, communication.

Introduction

The philosophical dimension of propaganda research is crucial for distinguishing this phenomenon from other methods of mass persuasion across various scientific fields. In today's world, inundated with diverse methods, channels, and mechanisms for transmitting, preserving, reproducing, and exchanging information, it's essential to conceptualize the term «propaganda» within contemporary scientific, political, and social discourse and to elucidate its key features within individual approaches.

The concept of «political propaganda» holds a dual nature. Historically, it was most prominently associated with the military sphere, where it served as a method for disseminating information during hostilities. Military entities actively employed propaganda as a means of information dissemination. Similarly, historians examining relevant institutions and their activities acknowledged the role of propaganda. Meanwhile, scholars of mass media argue that information technologies utilized by actors in mass public communication are the primary mechanisms sustaining political propaganda [1, p.3].

However, the lack of a universally accepted definition of «political propaganda» in modern science complicates matters. Existing approaches to conceptualizing and operationalizing this concept fail to provide adequate interpretation and understanding. Consequently, there is a pressing need for a comprehensive examination and elucidation of the main features of various approaches to defining «political propaganda» and an attempt to formulate an integrated definition of this phenomenon based on research findings.

Despite the common perception of propaganda as politically biased information dissemination aimed at garnering loyalty to certain ideas, its original role differed. Originating from the «Congregatio de Propaganda Fide,» an institution in Rome dedicated to propagating the Catholic faith, the term «propaganda» initially carried a neutral semantic character without political connotations [2, p.156].

During the Great French Revolution, this term was used by scientists to denote any organization that was engaged in the dissemination of its ideas and views. Thus, the cultural and linguistic context determining the historical meaning of this term is obvious. However, with the development of mankind and scientific and technological progress, there have been many more variations and approaches. Therefore, it is worth considering the main ones and their key features.

The following approaches - positivistic, psychoanalytic and sociological—deserve special attention within the framework of this study. These

approaches were formed not only in political science, but also in philosophy, ethics, psychology and other humanities. However, since the concept of «propaganda» is not the prerogative of one science, these approaches allow considering this phenomenon at an interdisciplinary level and taking into account its most universal aspects.

The views of such researchers as L. Newman deserve the greatest attention within the framework of the positivistic approach to the definition of the concept of «propaganda» (1999), B. Berelson [3, 4], H. Lasswell [5], H. Gerbner [6]. The leading researcher of psychoanalytic doctrine was E. Bernays [7].

Indicated approaches can be considered full-fledged and those that have developed and taken their place in the system of knowledge about social and political phenomena, namely about propaganda. Therefore, it is worth revealing more widely the content and main features of these approaches.

Also, political propaganda became the object of research by other authors, among them: J. Brennan, A. Demidova, O. Kotlyk, M. Lazarovych, G. Pocheptsov, M. Smyrnova, O. Voronko. The works of these researchers also reveal the qualitative and essential characteristics of the phenomenon of political propaganda and propaganda itself. However, consideration of the issue of positivistic, psychoanalytic and sociological approaches to the definition of this concept is given only minor attention. Therefore, the data of the work can be used as a discourse in the theoretical and methodological basis for research. They can provide an introduction to the most general system of knowledge on this topic.

Research methods

Positivist and psychoanalytic approaches to the study of political propaganda have different methodological foundations, as they are based on different theoretical frameworks and approaches to the analysis of human behavior and social phenomena. Accordingly, the positivist approach focuses more on objective data and quantitative analysis, while the psychoanalytic approach focuses on understanding the psychological mechanisms and individual psychological factors that influence the response to propaganda.

Research results

First of all, it should be noted that the topic of political propaganda is not new for philosophical considerations. In particular, it was actively involved in relation to ancient philosophers [See: 8-10]

If we talk about on Modern period, within the positivistic approach, propaganda is understood as a form of communication, rooted in the essential characteristics of communication itself. Positivism focuses on uncovering causal relationships that exist objectively, emphasizing individual behavior and the influence of external factors on it. It posits that external influences elicit uniform reactions from individuals, regardless of variables [2, p.78].

In this perspective, propaganda is viewed as a linear communication process with a single structure that can be traced. The recipient's reaction to the information is considered universal and is not taken into account. Key provisions of this approach include:

- the recipient's reaction is universal and uniform;
- communication follows a linear process.

These conceptual features allow for a deep and thorough examination of propaganda. Quantitative content analysis is often employed as the most suitable method of study within this approach. Propaganda is seen as a communication process that elicits consistent reactions from individuals exposed to it, explaining its effectiveness as a tool of influence on consciousness and worldview.

A significant aspect of this approach is the recognition that propaganda goes beyond mere tools, channels, slogans, and political colors. It is understood as a deeply ingrained mechanism that impacts fundamental aspects of human psyche and personality. Consequently, throughout history, various political, economic, religious, cultural, and other viewpoints have undergone changes due to the influence of propaganda of different natures [3, p.98].

Propaganda extends beyond traditional campaign materials and slogans, encompassing specific information messages with identifiable sources, transmission, and recipients. The certainty of information is crucial for the effectiveness of propaganda messages. However, the positivistic approach has its limitations. It neglects the socio-cultural and anthropological-personal context, overlooking how individuals with different views, beliefs, intelligence levels, and education perceive similar information differently. Additionally, individual characteristics, including the ability to decode and interpret information, influence the effectiveness and nature of propaganda. Moreover, this approach fails to determine a clear measure of propaganda effectiveness, raising questions about the appropriateness of using the term «effect» [4, p.138].

According to researchers, the positivistic approach is somewhat one-sided and lacks specific, self-sufficient definitions of propaganda. Thus, there's a need to refine this approach and develop a more comprehensive research method. In this regard, a combination of behaviorism and psychoanalysis is proposed as a potential approach.

The psychoanalytic approach, represented prominently by E. Bernays, delves deeper into the mechanisms of human behavior and the influence of propaganda. Bernays posits that individuals exhibit both observable behavior and «hidden» behavior influenced by irrational subjective attitudes. Therefore, political propaganda must consider these deeper psychological mechanisms in its efforts to influence individuals [5, p.54].

The author underscores the importance of subjectivizing the individual in understanding political propaganda. Contrary to the common perception of individuals as passive recipients of information, Bernays emphasizes that individuals

actively interpret and adapt received information based on their subjective views and understanding of the world. Thus, the psychoanalytic approach highlights the role of the individual as an active participant in the information exchange process, capable of providing feedback and interpreting message content [4, p.126].

These liberal approaches place the individual at the center of political propaganda analysis, focusing on the individual's internal, subjective attitudes. This perspective ensures the integrity and impartiality of the research. In contrast, more radical approaches with racist or totalitarian tendencies often prioritize the authority carrying out political propaganda, emphasizing its truth and infallibility above all else. Therefore, adherence to universal human values is essential in such studies.

Another notable aspect of the psychoanalytic approach is its recognition that political propaganda can originate from various sources beyond the state. According to Bernays, any institution or organization aiming to influence social reality can engage in political propaganda. Thus, the distinction between political and state propaganda becomes blurred in this approach.

However, while the psychoanalytic approach sheds light on new aspects of political propaganda, its focus on the individual's psychological nature may overlook objective realities and external factors. Therefore, a more comprehensive approach, such as the sociological approach, is needed to consider broader societal factors influencing political propaganda.

The sociological approach to studying political propaganda redirects focus from individual-level analysis to the broader societal context. Unlike the positivistic approach, which primarily explores the implementation and structure of propaganda processes, the sociological approach considers the macro-social level and deeper societal mechanisms influenced by propaganda.

Political propaganda targets broad segments of society rather than individual recipients. Therefore, understanding the sociological context is crucial for comprehending the phenomenon's impact and effectiveness. This approach acknowledges that propaganda aims to influence societal attitudes and behaviors on a large scale [4, p.46].

J. Elyul offers a conceptual framework within the sociological approach. He suggests that political propaganda seeks to shape perceptions of the social situation to make individuals believe they are making free choices within a constructed societal framework. Unlike ordinary propaganda, political propaganda aims to socialize individuals into a predetermined societal structure, even when societal changes are unnecessary or have already occurred. This emphasis on societal control and manipulation distinguishes political propaganda and underscores its inherent political nature [2, p.90].

In distinguishing between social phenomena and political propaganda, it's essential to examine the underlying motives, methods, and effects of the messaging. For instance, encouraging voter participation in elections through

transparent and neutral means, focusing on civic education and the importance of electoral rights, constitutes healthy propaganda. However, when individuals are coerced or manipulated into supporting a specific candidate or law without a genuine understanding of the issues at stake, it crosses into the realm of political propaganda [11, p.79].

Political propaganda can vary in legality and ethicality, depending on the intentions and methods employed. It's crucial to analyze the motives behind political messaging and assess whether it adheres to ethical standards. Despite its potentially negative connotations, political propaganda isn't inherently nefarious. When conducted ethically, it can involve legitimate attempts by political actors to persuade and inform the public about their ideas and positions [7, p. 59].

Maintaining impartiality and adhering to ethical principles in researching political propaganda is essential. Researchers should approach the topic with neutrality and distance, considering the diverse perspectives and implications involved. Ultimately, the ethical compliance of political propaganda rests on its alignment with moral principles and its respect for the autonomy and integrity of the audience [5, p.217].

The sociological approach, while valuable in examining the systemic effects of political propaganda on society, has its limitations. One such limitation is its narrow focus on the societal level, neglecting other crucial spheres of influence. While it recognizes political propaganda as a mechanism for shaping social order and connections within communities, it overlooks its impact on various other levels, such as individual, group, regional, national, and international [6, p.67].

Indeed, political propaganda operates not only on the societal scale but also on smaller and larger group dynamics, as well as across different geographical and political contexts. Ignoring these multiple levels of influence hampers a comprehensive understanding of political propaganda. Therefore, it's essential to investigate its effects at all these levels to grasp its full scope and implications.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the various approaches to defining political propaganda offer valuable insights into its nature and effects. Each approach sheds light on different aspects, whether individual-psychological or societal. E. Bernays' definition, emphasizing the systematic and enduring nature of events aimed at shaping public attitudes, encapsulates the essence of political propaganda. However, to fully comprehend this phenomenon, it's crucial to consider its multifaceted impacts across various levels of society and human interaction:

1) political propaganda can indeed serve as a constructive force within the political system, driving societal changes and fostering new social connections.

2) the impact of political propaganda varies between the individual and societal levels, influencing perceptions and underlying attitudes differently.

3) while political propaganda often involves manipulative tactics targeting the consciousness of the audience, it's not necessarily always associated with manipulation. It can also serve informative or persuasive purposes.

4) the effectiveness of political propaganda can stem from either individual or societal worldviews, depending on the approach taken in its analysis.

5) political propaganda is not merely a one-way process but also involves the exchange and modification of information between the propagandist and the target audience.

6) political propaganda is no longer solely the domain of the state; non-state actors, including organizations promoting democratic values, increasingly utilize it in the modern democratic landscape.

These approaches collectively contribute to a deeper understanding of the conceptual foundations, channels, methods, and forms of political propaganda. While each approach explores different aspects of the phenomenon, they collectively enrich our understanding and contribute to a more comprehensive view of political propaganda. Therefore, further research in this area, utilizing modern approaches, is essential for continued advancement in this field.

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ФІЛОСОФСЬКІ ВИМІРИ ПОНЯТТЯ «ПОЛІТИЧНА ПРОПАГАНДА»: МІЖ ПОЗИТИВІЗМОМ ТА ПСИХОАНАЛІЗОМ

Резюме

Здійснено порівняння двох основних сучасних філософських підходів до аналізу «політичної пропаганди»: позитивістського та психоаналітичного. З'ясовано, що позитивістський підхід, заснований на ідеї об'єктивності та спостережуваності явищ, аналізує політичну пропаганду за допомогою емпіричних методів і статистичних даних. Він прагне виявити закономірності та тенденції поширення та впливу пропагандистських меседжів на масову свідомість. З іншого боку, психоаналітичний підхід звертає увагу на несвідомі та емоційні аспекти політичної пропаганди. Він розглядає пропагандистські техніки як засоби підсвідомої маніпуляції та психологічного контролю, звертаючи увагу на символічні та суб'єктивні аспекти політичної комунікації.

Проаналізовано основні принципи кожного підходу, їх теоретичні основи та методологічний інструментарій. Наведено приклади з історії та сучасності, щоб проілюструвати застосування цих підходів до аналізу політичної пропаганди. Обговорюються сильні та слабкі сторони кожного підходу, а також їхній потенціал для розуміння природи та впливу політичної пропаганди в сучасному суспільстві.

Виявлено відмінності позитивістського та психоаналітичних підходів до розуміння політичної пропаганди від інших сучасних філософських шкіл. Так, з позиції екзистенціалізму пропаганду можна сприймати як спробу маніпулювати індивідуальним смыслом і цінностями, створюючи ілюзію вибору та свободи.

Ключові слова: політична пропаганда, пропаганда, позитивізм, психоаналіз, суспільство, комунікація.

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