



Journal of Politics and Development

ISSN 2632-4911

Volume 15 ■ Number 1 ■ Winter 2025

the rest: journal of politics and development

Previously published as Journal of Global Analysis (JGA)

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the rest: journal of politics and development

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The Role of Mass Media Propaganda in Shaping American Culture: A Study on the Torches of Freedom

the rest:
journal of politics and development
2025 | vol 15(1) | 98-114
www.therestjournal.com

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KEYWORDS

Mass media,
Propaganda,
Culture,
Advertising

ABSTRACT

This study examines the profound impact of mass media propaganda on American culture, with a particular focus on the iconic Torches of Freedom campaign. Originating in the late 19th century and led by Edward Bernays, this campaign aimed to reshape social norms surrounding women and smoking. Initially, a societal taboo prevailed, suggesting that respectable women did not smoke. Although tobacco consumption was common in America during the late 19th century, women were neither expected nor permitted to partake in the consumption of tobacco products until 1929. Women were eventually allowed the option to smoke discreetly, but even then, it was considered taboo by American society due to its perceived unfeminine nature. Particularly in North America and Europe, women's smoking had long been associated with immorality and questionable sexual behaviour. Through the analysis of historical documents, media artefacts, and scholarly literature, this research examines the multifaceted impact of the Torches of Freedom campaign on American culture. It explores how mass media, through carefully crafted messages and imagery, played a significant and influential role in shaping public perceptions and behaviour. By examining the campaign's relationship with dominant cultural ideologies and its effects on gender roles, the research aims to illuminate the complex interplay between propaganda, cultural values, and social change. The study focuses on advertising, consumerism, and cultural practices in the United States by examining the strategies employed in the Torches of Freedom campaign through the lens of propaganda.

Received November 30, 2024
Accepted January 20, 2025

Introduction

Propaganda refers to a series of activities carried out by states, power holders, or interest groups in various fields, such as politics, culture, art, and religion, aimed at promoting themselves, disseminating their ideas, and influencing society. Propaganda has played a significant role in many aspects of life from the past to the present. Historically, paintings, sculptures, reliefs, and written texts have served as tools for propaganda. It has been employed to disseminate various thoughts and ideas, adapting to the political, cultural, and technological developments of society across different

historical periods. The primary objective of propaganda has been to compel individuals within society to accept ideas or beliefs without questioning them, ensuring their long-term effectiveness by embedding them widely within the population.

The development of humanity over time and the increase in population necessitated the formation of societies. As individuals lived in close proximity within these societies, the establishment of cities and states became essential, along with the creation of shared ideas and rules to maintain social order. To ensure the adoption of these ideas and rules by society, political powers or administrations employed propaganda as a means of persuasion, utilising various tools. Technological advancements throughout history further enhanced the dissemination of these ideas. With the invention of the printing press, newspapers, magazines, and books emerged as key tools of propaganda. As technology advanced, radio, television, and other communication mediums further facilitated the spread of propaganda, increasing its frequency and effectiveness. Throughout history, propaganda methods and tools have played a critical role in reshaping ideas related to politics, culture, and religion, often breaking societal taboos and driving social change.

One historical example that illustrates the impact of propaganda on societies and cultures is Edward Bernays' "Torches of Freedom" campaign, conducted on behalf of cigarette manufacturers in the United States during the 1920s. At that time, public smoking by women was culturally stigmatised in the United States. To increase sales and encourage women to smoke, cigarette companies sought Edward Bernays' expertise. Bernays challenged these cultural taboos by initiating advertising and promotional campaigns that depicted smoking as a symbol of women's freedom and empowerment. Utilising traditional media such as newspapers, magazines, and television, his campaign had a profound impact, successfully breaking cultural taboos. As a result, during the 1920s, many women began smoking, leading to a significant increase in cigarette sales.

This study aims to explore how society and culture evolved and how cultural taboos shifted by examining Edward Bernays' "Torches of Freedom" campaign in the United States during the 1920s. The study focuses on the mass media tools Bernays utilised, particularly the advertising and promotional activities he conducted through these channels.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to explore and analyse the multifaceted role of mass media propaganda in shaping cultures. Mass media, including television, radio, newspapers, the internet, and social media, play a significant role in shaping public perceptions and attitudes. Propaganda, defined as the systematic dissemination of biased or misleading information, is typically employed to manipulate public opinion and influence social behaviour and cultural values. It has been used throughout history to shape the opinions of the masses and influence societal behaviour across various fields. In the United States prior to the 20th century, smoking was perceived as inappropriate and immoral behaviour for women, with laws enacted in some states to prohibit women from smoking. Edward Bernays challenged these norms and significantly increased cigarette sales through his Torches of Freedom propaganda campaign, employing advertising and promotional activities to encourage women to smoke.

Importance of Research

This research provides valuable historical insights into early mass media propaganda by examining the *Torches of Freedom* campaign organised by Edward Bernays in the 1920s to promote smoking among women. This historical context sheds light on the evolution of propaganda techniques and their long-term societal impact. Understanding the cultural taboo of women smoking, as exemplified by the *Torches of Freedom* campaign, and analysing how the manipulation of this taboo through

propaganda influenced culture offers critical insights into the psychology behind societal influence and manipulation.

The study underscores the significant role of mass media in shaping public perceptions, desires, and behaviours. The *Torches of Freedom* campaign demonstrates the power of mass media to influence consumer preferences and behaviours, showcasing how effectively media strategies can reshape societal norms and cultural taboos. By examining historical propaganda campaigns such as *Torches of Freedom*, this research provides a framework for understanding how similar techniques can be employed in the modern era to shape public opinion, influence behaviour, and cultivate followers around specific cultures or ideologies.

Moreover, by examining the role of propaganda in shaping consumer preferences, this study highlights the importance of fostering informed decision-making and consumer awareness. The insights gained from this research contribute to a broader understanding of how propaganda operates, enabling individuals to assess media messages and become more conscious consumers critically. As such, the study has implications for understanding the interplay between media, culture, and consumer behaviour in both historical and contemporary contexts.

Universe and Sampling

The population of this research consists of the campaigns designed by Edward Bernays for the *Torches of Freedom* initiative aimed at promoting smoking among women during the 1920s. The sample for this study includes five notable posters prominently associated with the propaganda efforts led by Bernays. These posters were selected based on their historical significance, visual prominence, strategic messaging, and alignment with the campaign's objectives of influencing societal perceptions and consumer behaviour among women.

Limitations of the Study

This research is focused on the advertising posters created for the *Torches of Freedom* campaign, organised by Edward Bernays in the 1920s, to encourage smoking among women. Due to challenges in accessing all propaganda posters from this campaign, five posters, selected based on their representativeness and prominence, were analysed using the purposive sampling method.

Research Methodology

This study employs semiotic analysis, a qualitative research method, to examine the posters produced as part of Edward Bernays' *Torches of Freedom* campaign in the 1920s.

Propaganda and Its Historical Process

Throughout history, individuals have sought to persuade others or entire societies regarding specific ideas or ideologies. They have attempted to achieve this through the communication tools available during their respective eras. Propaganda efforts, which initially began with speech and writing, have evolved to leverage various means of communication enabled by technological advancements. The influence of propaganda has progressively expanded alongside the development of mass media and the growing number of media users.

In the modern era, the reach of propaganda has extended globally, owing to the advancement of mass communication technologies. The Turkish Language Association defines propaganda as “efforts or purposes aimed at introducing, adopting, and spreading a doctrine, thought, or belief to others through verbal, written, or similar means” (TDK, 2023).

Propaganda, as a concept, has been defined in various ways by scholars. Cantrill described it as a set of deliberate actions or activities undertaken by individuals or groups to influence the thoughts of society or individuals (Cantrill, 1938, cited in Çelik, 2020:45). Jacques Ellul characterised propaganda as a series of activities conducted by an organised group employing psychological tools to ensure the participation of society or individuals in a psychologically integrated and systematically executed action (Topan, 1983, cited in Erlevent, 2012:72).

Jean-Marie Domenach referred to propaganda as an activity designed to guide the ideas and thoughts of society, creating an environment conducive to supporting a specific idea. This environment is shaped by disseminating these ideas through mediums such as radio, cinema, and the press, ultimately influencing public opinion (Domenach, 1969, cited in Karaaslan, 2023:9). Similarly, Edward Bernays defined propaganda as a consistent and continuous effort to shape public opinion or events, with the goal of influencing society's relationship with an initiative, idea, or occurrence (Petekoğlu, 1998, cited in Güllüoğlu, 2009:506).

Examining the historical evolution of propaganda, its primary objectives have been to manage society, shape public opinion, influence behaviours, impose various ideas and thoughts on individuals, and ensure the acceptance of these ideas. These activities often employ persuasion techniques, particularly those targeting human psychology (Bektaş, 2002, cited in Karakuş, 2021:466).

Historically, propaganda has generally been utilised by those in power within the political sphere to maintain their authority. The invention of the printing press marked a significant turning point. The subsequent spread of education and the development of written media, including newspapers, books, and magazines, facilitated the creation of a more democratic environment. This shift transformed propaganda from being exclusively a tool used by clergymen into a widely adopted method employed by political authorities (Öymen, 2002, cited in Karakuş, 2021:467)

Although the history of propaganda activities dates back to ancient times, the methods and conceptual foundations of propaganda were developed in the early 20th century. During the First World War, propaganda activities, particularly those disseminated through mass media, garnered significant attention from scholars. The works of Walter Lippmann in 1922 and Harold Lasswell in 1927 made substantial contributions to the theoretical foundations of propaganda. In addition to these studies, companies and foundations funded by the United States and some European countries supported propaganda activities across various fields (Güngör, 2018, cited in Sorgun, 2023:67).

At the beginning of the 20th century, propaganda techniques were applied to scientific endeavors by Walter Lippmann and Edward Bernays. During the First World War, Edward Bernays and Walter Lippmann were invited by U.S. President Woodrow Wilson to join the Creel Commission, which aimed to gain public support for entering the war on the side of Britain (Aydemir, 2011, cited in Erlevent, 2012:75).

Continuing with different definitions of propaganda, Harold Lasswell defines it as an effort to control thoughts by utilising meaningful symbols or social communication tools such as stories, rumours, news, and images (Lasswell, 1927, cited in Baban, 2005:67). Examining the definitions of propaganda reveals that it aims to impose a particular thought or idea on societies in alignment with specific wishes and desires, without resorting to hard power. As a result, these ideas and thoughts disseminate throughout society and retain their influence for many years.

Jowett and O'Donnell identified propaganda as a phenomenon of the modern era and argued that this period is based on three key elements. First, the rise of nation-states and the need to dominate the minds of people; second, the ease of transmitting propaganda messages to society through new

mass media; and third, the combination of these factors with psychological and behavioural disciplines (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012, cited in Çetinkaya, 2021:10). Propaganda has been actively utilised throughout history. For instance, during World War I and World War II, traditional media tools such as newspapers, radio, cinema, and television were employed for propaganda purposes (Yüksel & Dingin, 2020, cited in Karakuş, 2021:468). Cantril noted that propaganda texts dropped from aeroplanes during World War I was referred to as “paper bullets” and emphasised that these texts were as impactful as actual bullets in the final stages of the war (Cantril, 1938, cited in Çelik, 2022:45).

The earliest examples of propaganda in history are traced back to the Ancient Greek civilisation. During the Ancient Greek period, particularly before 500 BCE, rulers of the time used various propaganda techniques to support wars and to encourage the public to participate in religious ceremonies and adopt certain ideas. During this period, oratory -commonly referred to as “rhetoric”- political debates in city squares and theatre were used as tools to influence public opinion (Bektaş, 2002, cited in Çetinkaya, 2021:11). Propaganda activities were also prevalent during the Roman Empire. For example, during the reign of Nero, an organisation called “Augustales” was established, which gathered young people to propagate and glorify the empire’s victories through demagoguery in public squares. This organisation also incited public support for the persecution of Christians during wartime (Clews, 1972, cited in Karaaslan, 2023:12).

The concept of propaganda was first introduced by the Papacy to describe missionary efforts aimed at spreading the Catholic faith and later evolved to be used in various other fields (Ker, 1998:270). The first documented use of the term “propaganda” in history occurred in 1622 when Pope Gregory XV established the *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* (Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith). The Catholic Church had previously engaged in wars to promote missionary activities; however, Pope Gregory recognised the ineffectiveness of this approach and established the papal propaganda office to encourage people to willingly adopt these ideas (Pratkanis and Aronson, 2008, cited in Erlevent, 2012:74). The term “propaganda” originates from Latin and is derived from the word *propagate*, which refers to the act of planting cuttings or shoots from one plant into the ground to cultivate a new plant (Brown, 1992, cited in Yılmaz, 1995:4).

Throughout history, propaganda methods have been actively employed, including during the French Revolution, when numerous ideas of that era were promoted to gain public acceptance. During the French Revolution, philosophers such as Rousseau and Montesquieu disseminated concepts like “Freedom and the Acquisition of Rights” among the populace, ensuring these ideas were embraced by society. Their efforts were instrumental in defending the revolution and the ideologies of the revolutionaries (Çetinkaya, 2021:14).

One prominent figure who recognised the power of propaganda at that time was Napoleon. While serving in the army, Napoleon not only managed military operations but also issued directives to the palace and disseminated newspapers within and outside France. Highlighting the influence of the press, Napoleon remarked, “Four enemy newspapers can do more damage than an army of a hundred thousand men” (Okya, 1957, cited in Yılmaz, 1995:11).

The concept of propaganda was primarily utilized for religious purposes prior to World War I. However, during World War I, propaganda activities such as the dissemination of claims that Germans were cutting off the hands of children in Belgium were conducted. These activities proved effective in fostering widespread hatred against Germans within society (Bektaş, 2018, cited in Tekdoğan, 2021:6).

One of the countries that successfully organised propaganda during World War I was the British Empire. In 1917, Britain established the Ministry of Information under the leadership of Lord

Beaverbrook and an enemy propaganda department known as “Crewe House,” led by Lord Northcliffe (Cull & Cullbert, 2003, cited in Kurum, 2020:25). These institutions undertook various initiatives to maintain public support for the war, boost societal morale, and create negative perceptions and images of enemy states (Çakı, 2018, cited in Kurum, 2020:25).

Hitler and Lenin both recognised the importance of propaganda and implemented extensive propaganda campaigns. Lenin remarked on propaganda, stating, “The important thing is to create turmoil among society and to make propaganda.” Similarly, Hitler emphasised its significance, saying, “It enabled us to hold on to power, and propaganda will give us the opportunity to conquer the world.” Hitler further underscored the power of propaganda with the statement: “With a skillfully ambitious propaganda work, it is possible to make people believe that the most miserable life is lived in heaven” (Baban, 2005:71).

During World War II, propaganda was actively employed for military purposes. Russia and Spain established “propaganda divisions” specifically for this purpose (Domenach, 1969, cited in Gümüşboğa, 2017:41). In the early years of the Cold War, the United States, under the leadership of President Harry Truman, conducted a negative propaganda campaign against the Soviet Union. This campaign declared the perception of the “Red Danger of Communism” as the greatest threat to the capitalist system, utilising the mass media of that era to spread the message (Çetinkaya, 2021:20).

The United States is one of the most active countries in the world in conducting propaganda activities. During the Vietnam War, the United States extensively used cinema as a propaganda tool, producing numerous films. These films aimed to garner public support for the war and portray the Soviet Union in a negative light while presenting the United States as the defender of freedom and democracy (Çetinkayara, 2021:21).

The first instance of propaganda conducted over the Internet occurred during the 1998-1999 Kosovo War. Both the Federal Army of Yugoslavia and the Kosovo Liberation Army attempted to manipulate online news to serve their own interests and justify their actions during the conflict (Cull, Culbert, Welch, 2003, cited in Kurum, 2022:27).

In general, sources categorise propaganda into three types: white, grey, and black propaganda;

- **White Propaganda:** The source of the propaganda is clear and official. The key aspect of this type of propaganda is to appear reliable. In this method, the most effective and pre-selected information is presented transparently to the target audience in a one-way manner (Karaca & Çakı, 2018:77). For example, during World War II, the BBC, a British press organisation, was considered a reliable source of white propaganda, even by Adolf Hitler. Regarding the BBC, Hitler stated, “It says what it wants, but it tells the truth” (Tortop & Özer, 2013, cited in Karaca & Çakır, 2018:78). White propaganda activities are commonly observed in mediums such as news, radio, movies, music, books, and television (Karaca & Çakı, 2018:77).
- **Black Propaganda:** In stark contrast to white propaganda, black propaganda is the most covert type of propaganda. In black propaganda, the original source is always concealed, and the information is deliberately presented as originating from another source. Its objective is to fabricate an unreal event by distorting the truth with fake or falsified documents (İnce, 2016:30). For example, during the Gulf War, six hundred thousand people fled their homes and moved toward the Turkish border due to black propaganda claims that Saddam Hussein would massacre all people living in Iraq immediately after the U.S. operation began (Kumkale, 2006, cited in Yaman, 2007:42).
- **Gray Propaganda:** This type of propaganda creates uncertainty by circulating within society as gossip, as the source of information is not entirely clear, making it difficult to

determine whether the source is true or false. For example, Lawrence, a British intelligence officer, exaggerated the mistakes made by the Unionists in the Arabian Peninsula using various Arabic dialects. He portrayed the army's power as weak, heightened Arab nationalism, and incited the Arabs to revolt against the Ottoman Empire (Tarhan, 2013, cited in Ünalán, 2016:30). Gray propaganda activities are often secretly supported—financially and morally—by various political parties, media outlets, advertising agencies, corporations, organisations, or countries to achieve

Torches of Freedom

In 1920s America, smoking among women was considered shameful and a bad habit. American cigarette companies approached Edward Bernays to run a campaign to increase their sales. To encourage women to smoke, Bernays decided to design a campaign targeting their most sensitive emotions (Baghli, 2021:2). During this time, he employed various methods and propaganda techniques to promote smoking among women.

In 1928, George Washington Hill, president of the American Tobacco Company, sought to create a campaign to encourage women to smoke, particularly Lucky Strike cigarettes. Hill initially contacted Albert Lasker, a prominent advertising executive. Lasker proposed an advertising strategy that associated cigarettes with weight loss and youth (Baghli, 2021:3). This campaign proved effective, leading to increased cigarette sales. However, Hill wanted women to feel comfortable smoking outdoors (Baghli, 2021:3).

To fulfil Hill's objective, Edward Bernays reframed what was considered taboo at the time into a women's liberation movement (Baghli, 2021:4). This approach allowed the campaign to spread more quickly and effectively within society, particularly among women. Images of women's emancipation were often explicitly depicted in cigarette advertisements. For instance, a Lucky Strike advertisement featuring the headline "*Women are Free, an old prejudice is gone*" aimed to equate women's right to smoke with the significant issue of women's suffrage, thereby minimising public backlash (Belyk, 2020:5).

George Washington Hill, the president of American Tobacco, used the slogan "*A lean way to satisfy hunger*" to market cigarettes to women. Lucky Strike's 1925 campaign, "*Reach for a Lucky instead of Dessert,*" was one of the first media campaigns specifically targeting women. This message proved highly effective, increasing Lucky Strike's market share by over 200%. With Edward Bernays' assistance, American Tobacco made Lucky Strike the best-selling cigarette brand for two consecutive years (Amos & Haglund, 2000:4).

Thanks to its advertising efforts, Lucky Strike's sales skyrocketed from \$13.7 billion in 1920 to \$43.2 billion in 1925 (Tennant, 1965, cited in Cragi, 1999:8). Bernays employed various strategies to encourage smoking in all areas of life. For example, he attempted to change people's eating habits to promote cigarette consumption. He encouraged hotels to add cigarettes to their dessert menus. By designing alternative menus for hotels, Bernays propagated the idea that "*you can smoke instead of dessert to save yourself from the dangers of overeating*" (Burns, 2007:180). Through this campaign, he fostered the perception that smoking could help people lose weight.

Another goal of the cigarette companies was to enable women to smoke freely in public spaces. They aimed to challenge the prevailing taboo that "*women cannot smoke*" and to increase the smoking rate among women. Edward Bernays devised an effective method to normalise women smoking in public. In 1929, during the Easter Sunday parade in New York City, the Great American Tobacco Company hired several young women to smoke "*freedom torches*" (Lucky Strikes) as they marched down Fifth Avenue to protest inequality. The event was designed to attract significant public

attention. By leveraging the power of the press, Bernays ensured that this idea reached and was embraced by a wider audience.

Edward Bernays remarked, “*I learned how old traditions can be overthrown by a dramatic call spread by the media network*” (Amos & Haglund, 2000:4). In these campaigns, Bernays linked women’s smoking to the perception of equality with men in society, promoting the idea that women could achieve the same social status as men by smoking (Baban, 2005:123).

These studies demonstrate how effective propaganda can be when implemented with the right tools. For men, cigarettes evoked images of power, authority, and intelligence, while for women, they came to symbolise glamour, rebellion, and the onset of a new era of modernity and independence. As Brandt points out, smoking carries contradictory meanings: “*Smoking symbolised rebellion against social conventions, but also conformity to the principles of a growing consumer culture*” (Brandt, 1996, cited in Lea, Filho, & Rocha, 2016:56).

Another issue faced by Lucky Strike, one of the cigarette companies, was the colour scheme of its packaging. George Washington Hill felt that Lucky’s dark green packaging with bright red accents was perceived as unfashionable by many women. However, Hill was unwilling to change Lucky Strike’s highly recognisable colour scheme. To address this, Edward Bernays devised a strategy to make green fashionable. He organised an all-green charity ball, hosted a luncheon with a green theme for New York fashion editors, and arranged a series of performances. These included lectures by an art professor on the use of green in art and a psychologist on the effects of green on the subconscious (Craig, 1999:8). By doing so, Bernays sought to alter public perception and associate the colour green with fashion, thereby mitigating the notion that the cigarette packaging was outdated.

Thanks to these efforts, cigarette consumption among women increased. During that time, the lack of knowledge among women on how to smoke cigarettes became a subject of ridicule for men. Cigarette companies addressed this issue to some extent by featuring images of women smoking in their advertisements. Additionally, they supplied cigarettes to Hollywood stars and worked to have them appear in cigarette advertisements. The Philip Morris cigarette company even organised courses for women titled “How to Smoke” (Amos, 2000:4).

However, as medical research began to reveal that cigarettes caused lung cancer and other diseases, news of these findings started to appear in the press. In response, some brands in the cigarette industry attempted to mitigate the situation by advertising cigarettes as being less harsh and irritating. To further alleviate smokers’ health concerns, some companies began producing filtered cigarettes (Craig, 1999:9).

Before starting this campaign, Edward Bernays conducted research on women to understand how to persuade them to smoke. He consulted with psychoanalyst A. Brill, believing it was appropriate to approach the campaign from a psychological perspective (Erlevent, 2012:127). Through these consultations, he discovered that, in the subconscious of women, cigarettes symbolised male power and sexual dominance. To challenge this taboo, Bernays crafted his campaign around the discourse of “Torches of Freedom,” framing smoking as an act of defiance against male domination and a symbol of freedom (Erlevent, 2012:127). This narrative and movement proved effective among women, leading many to take up smoking.

Poster-1:

- Text elements: Women and Freedom
- The main character in the visual: Luck Strike Cigarette

- Supporting elements in the visual: emphasising that an ancient prejudice has been removed, and Women were freed from the legal, political, and social chains that bound them.



Poster-1, References: <https://omeka.uottawa.ca/jmccutcheon/exhibits/show/american-women-in-tobacco-adve/torches-of-freedom-campaign>

Poster 1 features a title emphasising women’s liberation, with content that highlights the idea of women achieving freedom. The main headline reads, “Women are Free, Old Prejudice is Eliminated.” The poster asserts that women have been liberated legally, politically, and socially from the chains that once bound them. Additionally, the statement, “When we removed the harmful substances in tobacco, we also removed the prejudices against smoking,” is included. The imagery of a hand holding broken chains reinforces the idea of women being freed from their restrictions, which is prominently conveyed in the foreground.

In the image, a whip is depicted in the man’s hand, symbolising the bullying and oppression of women. The accompanying text highlights the superior quality of Lucky Strike cigarettes. It references past prejudices against all cigarettes, which were criticised for being produced without the aid of modern science. However, the advertisement asserts that these criticisms and prejudices no longer apply. Lucky Strike is described as the best cigarette available, made from carefully selected tobacco. It is further emphasised that the product does not irritate the throat or cause coughing. Produced using modern systems, Lucky Strike is promoted as being free from harmful and irritating substances.

In general, Poster 1 initially highlights women’s freedom and the significant role cigarettes played in achieving this freedom. It then emphasises the high quality and harmless nature of the cigarettes. The inclusion of a statue depicting a holy woman holding a baby in her arms is undoubtedly part of the perception management effort. It conveys the notion that a woman smoking will not interfere with her sacred role as a mother.

The first title in Poster-2 is written in red to draw attention. The poster features a black-coloured female figure followed by an image of a thinner, healthier, happier, and more vibrant woman. The first title reads, “Is this you five years from now?” followed by the statement, “When you want to indulge yourself in overeating, buy Lucky Strike cigarettes instead,” with the word *Lucky* underlined

in this sentence. The positive connotation is reinforced by emphasising the word *lucky*. The poster conveys the message that cigarettes can prevent weight gain and help you appear thinner and more attractive.

Poster-2:

- Text elements: Women,
- Main character in the visual: Luck Strike Cigarette
- Supporting elements in the visual: emphasising health and good looks, weight loss



Poster-2, References: <https://prettysweet.com/lucky-strike-ads-smoking-diet/>

The text within the poster includes sentences promoting and praising the cigarette, such as “Lucky Strike cigarettes are the best cigarettes you can smoke and are made from the finest tobacco” and “a special and secret tobacco blend is crafted.” It is stated that the tobacco used in cigarette production is roasted, making it healthier. Additionally, the claim is made that “20,679 doctors have stated that Lucky Strike cigarettes irritate the throat less than other cigarettes,” attempting to create the perception that smoking these cigarettes does not negatively impact health. The slogan emphasises: “Roasted cigarettes protect your throat—against irritation, against coughing.”

Poster-3:

- Text elements: Women,
- The main character in the visual: Luck Strike Cigarette

- Supporting elements in the visual: emphasising that smoking is better than sweets and cigarettes increased appetite



Poster-3, References: <https://omeka.uottawa.ca/jmccutcheon/items/show/562>

The first headline on Poster-3, "I smoke Lucky Strike cigarettes instead of eating sweets," emphasises weight loss, suggesting that smoking cigarettes instead of consuming sweets can help women lose weight. The poster features a prominent image of Lady Grace Drummond, a famous woman of the time and the first and only woman to fly across the Atlantic to Europe in a Graf airship. To highlight this accomplishment, a large image of the airship is prominently displayed at the top of the poster.

In the poster, Lady Grace Drummond states: "The fact that we were not allowed to smoke until we got off the Graf airship did nothing but increase my appetite for cigarettes. How good the first one tasted. I am really very fond of cigarettes. Roasted tobacco is delicious, and instead of eating sweets, I smoke Lucky Strike, as many men have been doing for many years. As women, it's time for us to correct our body lines by smoking cigarettes."

She expresses her fondness for Lucky Strike cigarettes and emphasises that smoking can serve as an alternative to dessert for maintaining a slimmer figure. The poster portrays an influential and strong female figure, emphasising her preference for cigarettes and the association of smoking with strength and empowerment.

Overall, the slogans featured in the posters include straightforward expressions such as *“It’s toasted, no throat irritation, no cough.”*

Poster-4:

- Text elements: Doctor
- Main character in the visual: Luck Strike Cigarette
- Supporting elements in the visual: emphasising that smoking does not harm health through the doctor



Poster-4, References:https://tobacco-img.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/cigarettes/doctors-smoking/lucky_20679.jpg

Poster 4 features a picture of a happy, smiling doctor set against a red background to draw attention. The poster prominently displays a statement in capital letters: *“20,679 doctors say that Lucky Strike cigarettes are less irritating than other cigarettes,”* written in yellow and white for emphasis. A picture of a cigarette pack held by the smiling doctor is included to build trust and reinforce the message that cigarettes are harmless and do not pose risks to human health. The slogan used on the poster is: *“Roasted cigarette: your throat protection, against irritation, against coughing.”*

Poster-:

- Text elements: Celebrity
- The main character in the visual: Luck Strike Cigarette
- Supporting elements in the visual: Emphasizing through a famous singer that smoking does not harm the throat



Poster-5,

References:<https://omeka.uottawa.ca/jmccutcheon/files/original/6cof6445697f9e3c35d5661af429d222.jpg>

Poster 5 features a picture of Carole Lombard, a famous actress of the time. In this poster, not only the physical attributes of women but also their facial expressions are designed to appeal to the public. Women are depicted as calm and relaxed, with the emphasis that Lucky Strike cigarettes provide relaxation and stress relief.

The title of the poster reads, “*Singing coach advises her to smoke a light cigarette,*” conveying the message that smoking does not harm the voice. The image of Carole Lombard confidently and casually holding a cigarette reinforces the idea that women can exude confidence and relaxation through smoking.

In the poster, Carole Lombard explains why she smokes a lighter cigarette. She states: “*I recently had to sing in a movie, and I was considering quitting smoking. However, my voice teacher told*

me I didn't need to quit smoking; I could simply switch to a lighter cigarette. I soon realised that I could smoke as many Lucky Strikes as I wanted without the slightest throat irritation, even when I was singing and acting for 12 hours a day."

This statement is used to convey that smoking is not harmful and to build trust by suggesting that voice or music teachers endorse smoking lighter cigarettes as harmless. Additionally, the actress claims that despite long hours of acting and singing, her throat remained unaffected, and her performance was not impacted. The poster emphasises the message that smoking does not harm the throat, using the credibility of a famous actress to reinforce this idea. It even features the slogan, "Light cigarettes, toasted tobacco are good for your throat."

Evaluation of Findings

The analysis of the five posters reveals recurring elements and consistent themes that reflect the strategic messaging of the "Torches of Freedom" campaign. These shared characteristics and emphasised themes illustrate the deliberate use of propaganda techniques designed to influence women and reshape societal attitudes toward smoking.

Use of Trusted Assertions

The posters frequently incorporate endorsements from reputable figures or groups to lend credibility to the campaign's messaging. For instance, Poster 4 employs the image of a smiling doctor to validate claims that Lucky Strike cigarettes are less irritating, leveraging the perceived authority of the medical profession. Similarly, Poster-5 capitalizes on the celebrity status of Carole Lombard to suggest that smoking is not only harmless but also sophisticated and desirable.

Emphasis on Health and Harmlessness

Health-related assurances are a central component of the campaign. Nearly all posters highlight the purported safety of Lucky Strike cigarettes, with recurring statements such as "no throat irritation, no cough" (Poster-3) and claims of healthier tobacco due to roasting methods (Poster-2). These assertions aim to mitigate concerns about the health risks associated with smoking and position the product as a safe choice.

Visual Appeal and Symbolism

The posters employ visually striking elements, including bold colour schemes, prominent text, and symbolic imagery, to captivate the audience. For example, Poster-1 features a hand holding broken chains to visually convey themes of freedom, while Poster-4 uses a vibrant red background to draw attention to the doctor's endorsement. Such visual strategies enhance the effectiveness of the campaign's messaging.

Targeting Women's Aspirations

The posters are tailored to appeal to women's aspirations for beauty, health, and modernity. Posters 2 and -3 link smoking to weight management, presenting it as an alternative to sweets and a means of achieving a slimmer, more attractive figure. This messaging reflects societal pressures on women to conform to specific beauty ideals while positioning smoking as a tool for self-improvement.

Positive Connotations with Modernity and Science

The campaign frequently associates smoking with progress and scientific advancement. For example, Poster-4 highlights the involvement of “20,679 doctors” to suggest scientific validation of the product’s safety, while Poster-2 emphasizes the use of advanced roasting techniques to align Lucky Strike cigarettes with modern production standards. These references to science and innovation aim to frame smoking as a contemporary and rational choice.

The posters consistently employ themes of freedom, health, and modernity while leveraging endorsements and visual strategies to reinforce their messages. By appealing to women’s aspirations and aligning smoking with progress and empowerment, the “Torches of Freedom” campaign exemplifies the strategic use of propaganda to influence cultural norms and consumer behaviour.

Conclusion

Propaganda has been used throughout history to influence societies—religiously, politically, and culturally—by persuading people to adopt new ideas and ensuring their acceptance. Edward Bernays is one of the most prominent figures in the active use of propaganda.

At the beginning of the twentieth century in America, few could have envisioned how a cultural taboo, such as women smoking, could be transformed into a socially acceptable and desirable practice through strategic marketing and propaganda. However, Edward Bernays, through his research, use of psychological methods, and public propaganda campaigns, succeeded in framing women’s smoking as a “freedom movement.”

In his research, Edward Bernays discovered that men symbolised smoking as a representation of authority and dominance, which led women to aspire to these characteristics as well. Leveraging women’s desire for equality with men, he launched women’s smoking as a movement tied to feminism and freedom. Edward Bernays structured his propaganda efforts to break societal and cultural taboos by promoting the idea of women smoking safely in outdoor spaces. The propaganda campaign successfully convinced women to smoke, as it appealed to their desire to challenge traditional gender stereotypes imposed by men and to assert equal rights.

Through Edward Bernays’ campaign, cigarettes, which in the 19th century were predominantly associated with men and symbolised masculinity, became redefined in the 20th century as a symbol of women’s liberation. Many young girls and women began smoking during this period. Although research highlighting the health hazards of smoking was made available to the public, it had limited impact. The propaganda was so effective that women continued to smoke, disregarding the harm it caused to their bodies. Cigarette companies further reinforced this behaviour by using various advertisements to convince women that cigarettes were not harmful and even promoted them as a means to lose weight.

Edward Bernay’s propaganda campaign in the United States significantly contributed to breaking numerous cultural taboos and increasing cigarette sales by aligning with the women’s liberation movement. This campaign serves as a compelling demonstration of the effectiveness and power of propaganda.

The case of Edward Bernays’ cigarette campaign exemplifies the dual-edged nature of propaganda. While it can be a powerful tool for driving societal change, it also raises ethical questions about its capacity to manipulate public behaviour, often at the expense of individual well-being. Future research could explore how modern-day propaganda, particularly through digital platforms, continues to influence societal norms, with implications for public health and social ethics.

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Journal of Politics and Development

ISSN 2632-4911

Volume 15 ■ Number 1 ■ Winter 2025