**////Title: Propaganda and Mass Deception Depend Upon the Tribal Mind**

**////Standfirst:**

Propaganda is the systemic use of language with the intent to brainwash *rather* than to persuade. It has the subtle but pervasive power to ensnare an entire populace toward a predetermined attitude or outlook. Deceptive communication is now commonplace in this information age. Dr Robert L. Walsh recently examined how propagandists bend language for mass deception. He argued that what makes propaganda so insidious is a vestige of our prehistoric past – the Neolithic or *Tribal* mind.

**////Main text:**

Human language is a powerful and fascinating medium of exchange. It can be employed to teach, to narrate, to influence, or to mislead. The intentional use of language to deceive the masses is known as propaganda, but most fail to realise how diabolical propaganda actually is.

Throughout history, political leaders and public figures have fashioned ambiguities in language to cajole the public. A predisposition for deluding large groups may be rooted in a phenomenon referred to as the Neolithic or Tribal Mind – an unconscious collective ego vulnerable to propaganda.

Dr Robert Walsh, Director of Educational Programs and Professor of Communication at Sisseton Wahpeton College in South Dakota, recently wrote a scholarly paper exploring the ways in which propagandists sway public opinion. With support from the Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research, his paper explores the role of the Tribal Mind in facilitating mass deception.

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In the publication, Dr Walsh argued that propagandists conjure language as a kind of ‘sorcery’, carefully selecting linguistically enchanting words, phrases, and concepts that hook entire populations. Meanwhile, propagandists also try to quell debate over topics of controversy, effectively impeding critical thought.

According to Dr Walsh, to recognise, understand and circumvent mass deception, a thinking populace must closely explore the subtleties of human language. We should consider the origins of communication and its development over the course of human history.

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In the paper, he briefly outlined the etymology of human language, which some linguists estimate emerged between 50,000 and 150,000 years ago.

He then acknowledged the long-standing ‘rationalist versus empiricist’ debate, which ponders on whether humans can acquire knowledge by reasoning or whether knowledge is primarily acquired through direct experience of the world. These two lines of thought merged into the philosophical view that both reason and experience are necessary for the accumulation of knowledge.

He also briefly outlined some of the ideas expressed by the author Helen Keller, who reflected on the consequence in her infancy of having lost her eyesight and hearing. As she could not see or hear, the young Keller could not experience language directly, which the adult Keller believed caused a gap in self-awareness. Without language, she could not individuate.

Keller recognised that her consciousness only arose once she acquired language through specialised instruction. According to Dr Walsh, Keller’s experience may resemble the way in which language first originated in early humans. Some philosophers have suggested that language is what gives rise to consciousness – that consciousness relies on language.

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Dr Walsh also clarified a distinction between language and communication, as described by the renowned linguist Noam Chomsky in 1972. Chomsky suggested that language is a system of thought experienced as inner speech, while communication functions as a secondary linguistic system in human interactions.

To effectively manipulate *en masse* using language, propagandists usurp the intrapersonal component of language and splice the nuances that would otherwise set language and communication apart. Theorists have suggested that this can be achieved by deliberately targeting the Tribal Mind in a very particular way.

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The Neolithic or Tribal Mind has been described by theorists as an evolutionary mechanism aimed at promoting the survival of the species, which functions inside a ‘collective ego’. That is, the Tribal Mind is a collective tendency to comply with the beliefs of the majority of people, having significant advantages for survival.

This concept was explored by Edward Bernays, an American thinker who is considered a pioneer of modern public relations. In his ground-breaking book *Propaganda*, published in 1928, Bernays hypothesised that the public could be manipulated without them even realising, by propagandists versed in understanding group behaviour and thinking patterns.

While herd-type thinking can improve a society’s security, promote social support, and procreation, this group dynamic within today’s societies, where we are bombarded with information, makes individuals more susceptible to tactics of manipulation and mass deception.

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This collective thinking can promote the survival of groups of humans by reducing dissent and conflict, but it is deeply rooted in ignorance and fear. The Tribal Mind tends to crush individuality, encouraging members of a group to conform and follow specified norms.

Dr Walsh argued that although individuals now have access to a far wider pool of information and knowledge, the majority in modernity cling to this ‘herd mentality’. In addition, mass communication tends to reinforce mass deception and discourage critical thinking. As the Tribal mind is instinctual, Dr Walsh contends that extricating ourselves is a difficult undertaking that requires great determination and courage.

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Finally, his paper identified a ‘flaw’ of human language that is exploited by propagandists. This flaw is the din of incessant ‘chatter’ – a closed-circuit, mind’s-ear dialogue of ceaseless inner speech.

This chatter is hijacked and weaponised. Societal norms are reconstituted and imposed on a massive scale, actuating the Tribal Mind and detracting people from expressing generative ideas. Dr Walsh contends that to circumvent mass deception, individuals must excavate their own authentic inner voice, which may contend with collective beliefs.

He explained that the primary function of propaganda is to suppress this genuine voice by distorting evidence of reality and thwarting autonomous thought forms. He asserted that the propagandist skilfully diverts whole societies, exacting the Tribal Mind and distracting individual sovereignty.

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This SciPod is a summary of the paper ‘An Inquisition for Propaganda and Mass Deception: Deposing the Neolithic Mind’, in *Frontiers in Communication*, 2021. [doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2021.636292](https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2021.636292)

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