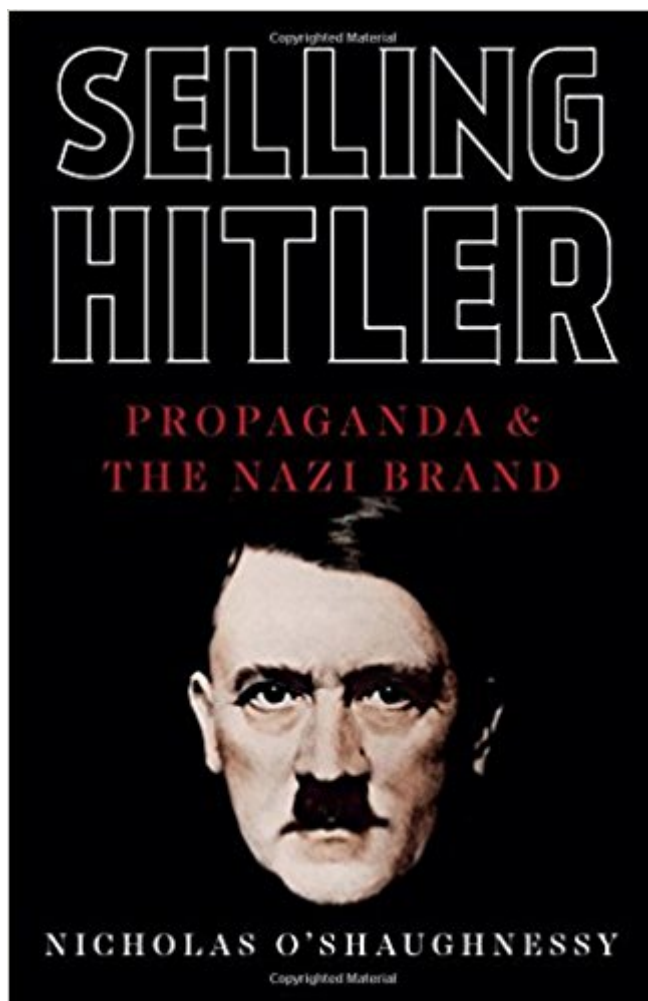


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# Selling Hitler: Propaganda And The Nazi Brand



## Synopsis

Hitler was one of the few politicians who understood that persuasion was everything, deployed to anchor an entire regime in the confections of imagery, rhetoric and dramaturgy. The Nazis pursued propaganda not just as a tool, an instrument of government, but also as the totality, the *raison d'être*, the medium through which power itself was exercised. Moreover, Nicholas O'Shaughnessy argues, Hitler, not Goebbels, was the prime mover in the propaganda regime of the Third Reich - its editor and first author. Under the Reich everything was a propaganda medium, a building-block of public consciousness, from typography to communications, to architecture, to weapons design. There were groups to initiate rumours and groups to spread graffiti. Everything could be interrogated for its propaganda potential, every surface inscribed with polemical meaning, whether an enemy city's name, an historical epic or the poster on a neighbourhood wall. But Hitler was in no sense an innovator - his ideas were always second-hand. Rather his expertise was as a packager, fashioning from the accumulated mass of icons and ideas, the historic debris, the labyrinths and byways of the German mind, a modern and brilliant political show articulated through deftly managed symbols and rituals. The Reich would have been unthinkable without propaganda - it would not have been the Reich.

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## Customer Reviews

"Selling Hitler is a thorough, bitter, and entirely virtuoso performance, ranging fluently over all the various mechanisms by which the Nazi propaganda apparatus attempted to create the idea of a

nationalist paradise just out of reach, deliverable only by the new order."--Open Letters Monthly"A fresh, surprising and important look at a neglected aspect of the history of Nazi Germany."--Jewish Journal "A fresh take on an area of scholarship dominated by historians, *Selling Hitler* teems with insight into the subtle ways in which a subliminally reinforced political message can become consciously internalized and defended by well-intentioned citizens." --Los Angeles Review of Books

Nicholas O'Shaughnessy (PhD) is Professor of Communication at Queen Mary, University of London. He studied at Cambridge, Oxford and Columbia universities and among his many publications are *The Marketing Power Of Emotion* (OUP) and *The Phenomenon of Political Marketing* (Macmillan).

The concept of propaganda in Germany during the twenties and thirties saw the use of advertising and the current mass media to propel the "Hitler brand" to everyone within the state everywhere. The marketing of National Socialism as a way of life was a functional department of the government itself. From symbols to historical perspectives to language was effectively used to pursue a change of public consciousness to embrace the party way and to reject all else as un-German. The book is neither casual nor academic but fits in between. Very readable for those already conversant with such material and the general reader will also find it useful.

Hitler started out in PR. He was an army propagandist. When the war was over and he found himself back in civilian life, he joined a small labor party as communications director. He soon ousted the founder and created an incident in Munich that led to a sensational trial. This made him a national politician and celebrity. He devoted two chapters of *Mein Kampf* to the importance of propaganda. He developed the truck-mounted loudspeaker to publicize speeches and martial music. He was constantly on the radio. He invented quasi-religious ceremonies like the entrance of the flagbearers. The endless repetition of simple and simplistic slogans cemented his party's control of mindset. He admired the British propaganda machine, claiming it was responsible for victory over Germany in WWI. Under Hitler, Germany became enamored of Madison Avenue, and applied its lessons. *Selling Hitler* is a master class in brand marketing. The Nazis controlled all communication. When Hitler made a speech, everyone had to place speakers in the streets so all would hear him. The party bought a film studio and produced newsreels to suit, as well as feature films that reminded viewers of the greatness that was Germany, the traditions and the myths that built a nation. In addition to radio, newspaper, film and public spectacles, Hitler actively

spread rumors in whisper campaigns. Like internet "facts" today, Nazi propaganda, repeated constantly, soon became truths. "The idea was not to brainwash, but to show that the great mass of Germans believed" and so should you. Everyone was to be on message, all the time. It was as high pressure and comprehensive a marketing campaign as was ever implemented. Symbolism was the default mode of Nazi terminology. Everything was measured for its symbolic possibilities. To the point where roofs had to be pitched because flat roofs were Middle Eastern and therefore Jewish. The word fanatic became the highest term of approval. Absolutely everything was meant to persuade. From architecture to ceremonies, from word choice to myths, from symbols to sounds, everything had to add value to the Nazi brand. Hitler himself rotated the swastika to give it dynamism (moving upwards towards the right). Every public space was an opportunity for a symbolic message, carved in stone, draped in a flag or mounted with a statue. So when Hitler announced it was Poland that invaded Germany, everyone believed it. There was no other credible source. During the war, the propaganda machine simply attributed German atrocities to the victims, making local Germans the true victims of Polish, British or French horrors. Everyone bought it. O'Shaughnessy's book is as thorough and complete as it could possibly be. He examines every aspect of language, custom, dress, myths, media, words, phrases and scapegoats. He acknowledges that Hitler actually invented none of it. All of these tactics have been employed before (and since). But Hitler pulled it all together, and with Goebbels as his tool, implemented ubiquitously. There is a great deal of space given to Jews as scapegoats, but even Hitler admitted that if there were no Jews, he would have had to invent them. There was actually risk that if he did manage to eliminate all Jews, he would lose mindshare. It was that central to distracting Germans, and he knew it. In an interesting side note, Alexis de Tocqueville warned that idiotic notions of race superiority and social Darwinism would play only too well in Germany. This was the 1850s, when the word Aryan got transferred from the name of a language to the name of a (nonexistent) race. Germans already had a reputation for being suggestible to such myths. David Wineberg

This is a fascinating and sophisticated analysis that answers a baffling question: why and how did Germany allow Hitler to come to power?

Mr. O'Shaughnessy states his premise in his introduction. Propaganda was the lifeblood pumped from the heart of the National Socialist Workers Party. He then corroborates his position with an exhaustive and admirably documented examination of the strategy and tactics brought to bear in

each stage of the Nazi party's existence: birth, coming of age, dominance and death throes. None of the bogus theories trumpeted by Hitler were original. Everything was borrowed. Attribution was distorted and specious yet all through the early years up to Stalingrad, Hitler and his acolytes were able to convince Germans that what they wanted to believe was what he was giving them. Even after Hitler's suicide, half of the German people believed in him. Ancient history? Mass rallies, the draw of entertainment, simplicity of language and sloganeering, sky-is-falling rhetoric, press and other media manipulation, rumor and innuendo offered to a part of society that is searching for international respect and vindication, we witness it in our own time. The enemy is at our doorstep. True, the media are more sophisticated, but the elements of propaganda remain the same. Well done, Mr. O'.

I kept waiting for the author to get to the point. The book is far too academic and vague. Not enough solid examples of what he is trying to talk about. We did already know how important propaganda was but this book tells us very little more. There are far better books about Hitler and the Nazis. Midwest Independent Research, educational websites. History, mwir-history.blogspot. There are book lists.

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