

<http://politics.flackcheck.org/patterns-of-deception/>

[GDVP Editor: The “illustrations” of these patterns of deception have been deleted from this PDF copy of the website, (1) since they probably will be deleted after a short period of time AND (2) to make this a more compact reference to these “patterns.” Please go to the link above to see the examples. (November 2, 2012)]



The Patterns of Deception page identifies recurrent deceptive techniques in the 2012 campaign season, provides illustrations of each and links to FlackCheck.org videos that debunk the deceptive content. These materials are designed to help viewers identify flaws in arguments in general and political ads in particular.

Conspiracy Theory



The false belief that sinister forces have succeeded in creating appearances at odds with reality. The conspiracy theorist believes that these powerful forces are able to fabricate forms of evidence that deceive the public about what is actually going on. As a result, proof that the conspiracy does not exist is taken as evidence of the cunning of the conspirators.

Deceptive Audio



The sounds that we hear both contextualize what we see and cue our responses. Consider the impact of the patriotic song, the cheering crowd or the soothing effect of a mother's lullaby. Now replace them with clashing cymbals, a jeering crowd, or the cries of a terrified child. By strategically inserting sound, political ad makers manipulate our responses to pictures, particularly those of their favorite candidate, and the opponent.

Deceptive Dramatization



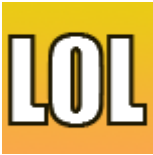
Audiences recall pictures more readily than words. Pictures tied to a dramatic narrative have a special power. As a result, visual dramatization is a potent means of deception. Because political ad makers know that reporters are reluctant to call out the inferences invited by pictures, they often construct scripts containing accurate words but misleading images.

Deceptive Framing



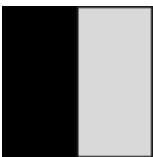
Humans assume that images follow each other for a reason. When two segments are edited together or two pictures are abutted, the audience naturally assumes a relationship between the two. In general, the first creates the frame, making sense of the second. Often the second is designed to provide evidence for the first. Political ad makers manipulate this human tendency by juxtaposing unrelated content in ways that prompt a false conclusion.

Distraction Using Humor



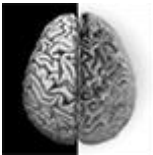
While our attention is captured by a talking horse we may be uncritically absorbing misinformation, in this case about Governor Romney's record and intentions. Attention grabbing visuals, a strong narrative or involving forms of humor are powerful means of redirecting attention.

Double Standard



Applying a different standard to the record of an opponent than to that of an ally.

False Dichotomy



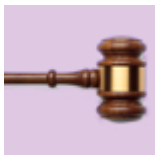
When political rhetoric offers a false dichotomy, it often inaccurately reflects or characterizes the existing choices, reducing them to one cast as good and the other as evil, and sets them in diametrical opposition to each other. Sometimes called a Manichean choice.

Glass House Attacks



Audiences assume that an attack indicates a distinction. Why, otherwise, would an ad assert that an opponent is unqualified because he or she supported the attacked bill or behavior? In a surprising number of instances, political ads attack an opponent for a behavior, position or vote that the attacker has made as well. Those making such attacks are like the proverbial person who lives in a glass house but nonetheless throws stones.

Guilt By Association



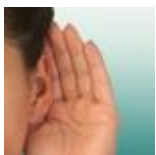
Guilt by association is usually defined as "the attribution of guilt (without proof) to individuals because the people they associate with are guilty." In political ads, pictures of the attacked are juxtaposed with pictures of those the audience despises in order to falsely assert, based on some superficial similarity, that the two are ideologically, temperamentally or biographically similar. Alternatively, these forms of visual guilt by association are used to imply that because the two individuals were once seen together, or worked together in some capacity, they endorse each other's views.

Hearing What's Not Said



In the process of making sense of their world, humans harmonize the cues in their environment. For example, when words are superimposed on a picture we assume that they are characterizing the individual being shown. We do this even if the words bear no direct relationship to the picture. Political ad makers know that viewers are more likely to make this assumption if the print on the screen is credited to a respected source. Ad makers invite suspect inferences by featuring supposed passages from reputable news organizations or government agencies.

Hearsay



Asserting that something must have occurred because someone told you that it has.

Insinuation



An indirect often negative implication, also called innuendo. Because it works by implication, insinuation permits consultants to deny that the meaning heard by the audience was intended by the ad.

Misappropriating Credibility



By sourcing their claims to reputable news media and organizations, political ads try to appropriate the credibility viewers grant these groups. With the news media, the move misleads when an incomplete citation elicits the assumption that the cited content comes from a news article or the newspaper's editorial page, when instead the quote was authored by a partisan source and appeared in an op-ed, column, or letter to the editor.

Mishearing What's Said



Because what we read tends to over-ride what we've heard, the meaning contained in print tends to be better remembered than the meaning contained in spoken words. Consultants exploit this tendency by having the narrator voice accurate, qualified statements while placing false statements or misleading images on the screen. This permits them to argue that the ad is technically accurate because part of it is.

Misplaced Referent



Ad makers often capitalize on the potential ambiguity of pronouns such as "we," "you" and "they" to take the words of opponents out of context.

Out of Context



By ignoring parts of a statement or the context in which a statement was made, political ad makers distort our sense of what an opponent said or meant. When a selectively edited statement is repeatedly aired, we remember it as if it actually happened in the way shown in the ad.

Outdated Evidence



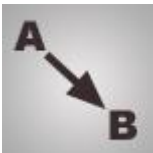
Like many other economic indicators, employment data are updated monthly. When the latest numbers show improvement over past months, those who are attacking incumbents are tempted to cite older figures without revealing when they were actually gathered. The same type of move occurs when a candidate attacks a position an opponent has discarded as if it is the one currently espoused.

Photoshopping



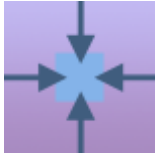
Photoshopping is usually defined as "digitally using computer software to alter a photographic image."

Post Hoc Ergo Propter Hoc



"Post Hoc Ergo Propter Hoc" is a logical fallacy that assumes because Y follows X, Y was caused by X. Literally translated, "post hoc ergo propter hoc" means: after this, therefore, because of this.

Restrictive Definition



Politicians select language with care to ensure that we hear what they want us to hear, even if the language doesn't reflect their candidate's actual record. Nowhere is this axiom truer than in discussions of taxes, a word incumbents shun. The benign synonyms that result include words such as "fees" and "mandates."

Seeing What's Not Heard



A graphic image has more staying power in memory than a spoken sentence or phrase. When they conflict, pictures speak louder than words. By speaking words that are accurate while showing deceptive visuals, ad makers prompt false inferences.

Selective Use of Evidence



Selective use of evidence occurs when only evidence favorable to one's case is offered and contrary evidence ignored. Those who selectively use evidence tell part of but not the whole story.

Visual Vilification



Visual vilification occurs when an unflattering photo of an opponent is selected to underscore an attack.

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