PROPAGANDA AND THE WAR ON TRUTH: EXAMINING INFORMATIONAL INCONSISTENCIES GOVERNING SOUTH AFRICA’S COVID-19 POLICY RESPONSE

Demi Harmse
Department of Social Science
Healing Roads
Steyter Township, Gqeberha, Eastern Cape, South Africa, 6000
demi.harmse@gmail.com

Abstract
A review of the intellectual and policy environment announces the absence of transparency and rational discourse in assessing the prevailing Covid-19 policy measures. Contextually, propaganda thrives in times of political uncertainty as it serves to either amplify confusion, induce moral dilemmas, or disguise meanings. To this end, this study examines the quality of political communication, underpinning South Africa’s public policy response to the Covid-19 pandemic. It aims to trace the influence of propaganda in informing policy origins and efficacy as it concerns the lethality of Covid-19. Importantly, informational irregularity must be treated with greater accountability and intellectual inquiry as it concerns masking and vaccine hesitancy. Following a qualitative approach and case study research strategy, this study begins by outlining the propagandistic assault on truth and rationality. Next, it confronts the seeming normality, with which the state, media, intellectual and scientific community have nonchalantly dismissed inconvenient truth in the name of misinformation. Of significance is the war on truth and the growing intellectual appetite for ideological realignment that esteems emotional triumph over empirical soundness. Ultimately, the research shows that scientific rationale has been demoted in favor of social solidarity. Finally, propagandist techniques and elements of deception theory entice the analytical appetite by exposing the modus operandi of deceptive operations at work in both masking and vaccine campaigns. The key findings indicate the use of propaganda and deception tactics at play in perception management with a view of influencing public action, corrupting public discourse and delegitimizing the need for factual accountability, concerning compliance with incoherent Covid-19 policy measures.

Keywords: Covid-19, propaganda, deception, public policy, disaster management, South Africa, vaccine hesitancy

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1. Introduction
Truth lives in the tension of two conflicting realities. Munroe [1] claims that truth is simply ‘original information’. From this understanding, it follows that truth enables freedom from error. So, an attack on the existence of truth is essentially an attack on the value of freedom itself. And the attack on the intellectual freedom of thought is, perhaps, among the most subtle yet detrimental to the critical thinking capacity of the public mind. Amid the evolving intellectual culture of redefinition, navigating the age of uncertainty demands that the public is equipped with the requisite intellectual tool kit, cultivated through logic, creativity, and practice [2]. These tools offer intellectual self-reliance a necessary defense against the postmodern onslaught. While postmodernism works to discredit the existence of truth, propaganda works to devalue its quality. Above all, the postmodern context works aggressively against analytical authenticity by attacking the origin and value of truth. Importantly, the accessibility of knowledge does not replace the need to qualify whether the information provided is consistent with empirical realities. Not based on its origin alone, per se, but the factuality of its claims. Furthermore, the abundance of information at the disposal of the public echoes the need for the quality of political communication, received by the public to be assessed.

Usually, social unrest and change act as a precursor and enabling environment for propaganda to thrive and control public opinion. Hence, evaluating the security conditions most susceptible to the dissemination of compromised information remains a necessary function of effective political communication. Cunningham [3] argues that propaganda is methodically inclined to trivialize the grandeur epistemic values of truth and understanding. In this way, it seeks to corrupt reasoning, devalue the need for evidence-based decision-making and dismiss the necessity for procedural safeguards. Hence, a major contributing factor to the maintenance of an unethical social state of affairs. Perhaps it takes the rehabilitation of propaganda as a conceptual lens to make sense of cur-
rent trends in political thinking and behavior, witnessed during the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, propaganda seems the best candidate able to provide a unitary understanding of the perplexing new realities of our own social contexts [4–6].

The theory of relativism in education is giving rise to devaluation, degradation, dehumanization, and the desensitization of the public conscience and mind. There is significant danger in no longer believing in absolutes. In this regard, a postmodern era refuses the existence of an objective reality, most notably because of the subsequent exclusivity that follows. Not only this, but exclusivity is obviously oppressive to the many falsehoods, parading as truth, in the name of safety and solidarity. Zacharias and Zacharias [7] add that a truth claim, on the other hand, rises above the bondage of subjectivity, thereby violating determinism. Combs and Nimmo [8] point out that propaganda works to impose truth instead of searching for it. In fact, propaganda is intentional about erasing the need for a search and verification mechanism entirely. Similarly, Ellul [9] notes a secondary consequence to the imposition of truth that ultimately dismantles effective interpersonal communication, while undermining ethical imperatives. Often, the scale and complexity of intertwined health and political crises place restrictions on our rational faculties and impede individual problem-solving. This makes the decision-making process vulnerable to fear and other inhibiting factors. Acknowledging that governments must balance the immediacy of resolving security threats in the interest of the collective public, solutions must be taken, which do not violate the expression of individual human rights and violate conscience. Social solidarity does not have to come at the expense of constitutional rights [10–12].

As alluded to, the rise in mass insecurity amplifies the public’s need to be protected and so propaganda enlarges its reach in pinning a red label on both intellectual and policy rivals. While noting that unforeseen natural disasters occur, much of what is attributed to the violation of human rights, is a deliberate creation of a bureaucratic mind. Of the most consistent violations in human history, the recognition of individual rights and freedoms emerges as the victor. Conditions of social change facilitate the voluntary categorization of humanity. Therefore, social change creates conditions that allow for the grouping of individuals into social groups where the public is ready to associate themselves with whatever element in the environment offers the most protection for the least authority. Lippman [13] makes the claim that propaganda aims to get the attention and affect the behavior of social relations and group memberships by exploiting the virtuosity of human values. According to Markova [14], propaganda’s technical latitude makes provision for perception management, psychological warfare and global communications strategies to name a few. To this end, once society is organized to accommodate group think, propaganda prepares a people to voluntarily accept the rule of a totalitarian regime.

Surveying the intellectual and policy landscape reveals the absence of transparency and rational discourse in assessing the prevailing Covid-19 policy measures. Firstly, this study will identify the signs of abusive government and media behavior as the determinant of public opinion, drawing on deception theory and propagandist techniques. Of significance then, is evaluating the role of propaganda in corrupting rational decision-making. To be effective, both the identification and assessment of propagandist techniques on the politics of deception must take priority. Similarly, it is needful to articulate the analytical strength of propaganda in creating and fuelling a socially hostile climate – grossly intolerant of any policy position despite its scientific or moral validity.

Before tracing the effect of propaganda on South Africa’s disaster management strategy, it is important to understand its postmodern impact on the erosion of truth and ethos of reason. Closely associated with the encroaching influence of propaganda is the pathway, paved by the postmodern war on truth. Notably, governments deal in the realm of perception and not truth. With this view, propaganda seeks to alter perception and in this case the lethality of the Covid-19 virus with the purpose of affecting public action or inaction. Secondly, it will prove how governments succeed in manipulating educated masses even in the face of counterproductive evidence. And in doing so, make clear the role of propaganda in averting rational discourse and decision-making, governing South Africa’s public policy response. Factors, such as deception objective, deception mechanism, sources of data and feedback channels, deception target and target awareness, will be used to assess the findings of this study. To this end, deception theory offers explanatory insight into the
incongruities in evidence and the indicators of deception alongside the actual activity as it concerns masking and vaccine hesitancy in South Africa.

2. Materials and Methods

This study has relied on a qualitative framework to make sense of its explanatory input as it concerns both the origin and efficacy of Covid-19 policy measures in a propaganda driven policy environment. As a desktop study, both primary and secondary sources were useful in articulating the nature and veracity of propaganda and its destructive influence on the quality of political communication, received by the public during the Covid-19 pandemic. Specifically, case study research provides conceptual insight into how deception is carried out in regulating the dialogue between the government, media and the public. Further, it prioritizes pattern identification, conceptual clarification, theoretical interpretation and theory building [15]. These are essential activities, pertinent to answering the stated objectives. Additionally, content analysis proves a useful tool in articulating the intentions of propagandistic messages and their deceptive character. For this reason, the range of sources consulted include reports, articles, books, documentaries, dissertations, interviews, advertisements, media, the Internet, and specialized intelligence reports. More pointedly, content analysis has facilitated the exploration of complex themes and concepts that require an unrelenting commitment to scientific inquiry. In sum, the case study provides an avenue for the development of discourse on the influence of propaganda and deception theory on the quality of information the public receives from trusted democratic institutions during times of political confusion and crises. It favors the notion that only a critically thinking public mind is able to withstand the influence of state tyranny, intellectual indoctrination and media sponsored propaganda [16–18].

3. Results

3.1. Implications of the postmodern war on truth

This section focuses on the problem of misinformation and propaganda in light of South Africa’s disaster management strategy. It outlines the origins of propaganda, its role in compromising informational credibility and its applicatory success in masking historical atrocities. Building on the phenomena, revealed earlier, it remains necessary to identify the impact of postmodernism and ideology on compromising analytical integrity.

A useful starting point to understanding public confusion and human threat susceptibility is assessing the academic and social environment, which is arguably driven by postmodern thought. The over-reliance on this paradigm of thought fuels public uncertainty and ultimately hampers the speedy resolution of crises. Social science is only at the beginning of probing the depth of hatred that mankind is capable of. The literature makes it clear that most of the ideas responsible for human suffering can be traced to the social sciences. In short, postmodernism is fluent in the language of fighting intellectual merit. Meritocracy functions as an engine of insight and innovation. Corruption, however, emerges as the biggest disruption of meritocracy because it favors alternate objectives. Saad [19] makes the case that ‘ones ego-defective desire to be proven right’, should not outrank the inquiry of truth itself. Even though it is possible for differences in thought to co-exist, to treat different schools of thought as having or bearing an equal claim to truth, is utterly false. The laws of logic and non-contradiction tell it to be so. Truth is multidimensional. Truth is also progressive. As a result, some information is truer than others and the denial thereof has sponsored much-unwanted human tragedy.

Knowledge is hierarchical. Why is it so and does the structure, in which knowledge is assimilated and validated, make it oppressive? But what is more important? The source of the knowledge or the knowledge itself? Should knowledge in pursuit of truth be abdicated because of its ethnic origin or misuse and misapplication for alternate political ends? Hence, the neglect of nuance. If nuance occupies its rightful place in academic discourse, it becomes difficult for academics and politicians to mobilize division in society by locating a single enemy responsible for all misfortune. Postmodernism thrives off the inability to arrive at a clear answer and therefore a fluctuating standard of policing misinformation and injustice. Saad [19] put it this way, unlike politics, science is evidence-based, thus the prioritization of being in the know. Contrastingly, the current academic
landscape is known for ideological dogma, supplanting scientific fact. More pointedly, the more ideologically submerged a society becomes, the further a society drifts from truth. Not only does society drift from truth, but it begins to detest it. This is to the propagandist’s benefit. If truth is no longer valued, truth can be controlled at whim.

Auschwitz reveals what humanity is capable of, even with all their education. Nonetheless, the Germans were the most educated and industrialized society yet ordinary individuals were used to assassinate a people. To act as if this level of abhorrent evil is beyond mankind and governments is to misrepresent history and turn away from the atrocities, committed by mankind, as though not committed by well-intended and well-meaning leaders who prioritized the needs, wants and safety of the public. Evil is not beyond even the most educated citizenry. It is clear, that education alone is not a defense against propaganda. Foulkes [20] cautions against ‘invisible propaganda, perpetuating itself as common sense’. For instance, Nazi propaganda does not come marching toward us, waving swastikas and chanting Sieg Heil. The full might of its power is evidenced in its concealed character and seemingly natural appearance. This is fundamental in facilitating its seamless and total integration with the accepted value-laden power symbol of a particular society.

In fact, the more intellectually sophisticated a person, the more susceptible they are to accept the tyrannical behavior of governments and the media. This is because tyranny and control are masked by language and the credentials of the intellectuals. Put plainly, intellectuals use their position to infer credibility. This tactic brings to question whether the dispenser of an idea is more important than the idea itself. The key to answering this question is to determine which actor carries the burden of proof. By extension, it is not uncommon for educated masses to fall prey to propaganda and proceed to convince the public to follow suit. Because the public invests much trust in the legitimacy of the actor whether it be the media or an expert, there is seldom a need to assess the truthfulness of their claims. The convolution of crises births the simultaneous awareness of them potentially being hijacked in favor of alternate covert or overt political ends. Seeing that political communication can be used to drive totalitarian political agendas not necessarily in the interest of the peoples’ welfare, it remains needful to monitor the influence of propaganda on politicizing public health information.

Political communication is a vital component of effective democracies. However, the expansive policy space and promulgation of new political actors, influencing public life, exposes democracies and heightens their susceptibility to propaganda. Especially in the context of political crises. Betts [21] put it this way, the presentation of facts matters. Facts, put together, are the face of the age. Notably, no sector is immune from the influence of propaganda and politicized information. Similarly, no discipline or discourse is immune from corruption. In this setting, corruption refers to the value estimation of objectives other than truth. Intellectuals, scientists, the media, and governments have participated in human suffering to various degrees. Governments, academics, and the media influence citizens and the public to cede individual sovereignty in pursuit of collective state-regulated management and freedom in the name of fairness. States together with their ruling regimes have sought to initially limit and then proceed to violate individual human rights for many reasons whether to promote their ideology or induce fear [22–25].

Muggeridge [26] points out that the Ukraine famine was not a natural disaster, drought or epidemic but a deliberate creation of a bureaucratic mind. By extension, the Ukraine famine happened because Stalin’s socio-economic plan necessitated the collectivization of agriculture from a purely theoretical position without any evidence or consideration of human suffering as a consequence. So, the great famine was really a politically induced crisis in the name of and in defense of what an ideology is able to achieve. Moreover, reporting on the Ukraine famine was banned and the international press was paid by Stalin and told what to report. Usually, the free press is relied upon as a buffer against the encroachment upon the flow of information and the most successful vehicle for the mass mobilization of opinion against undue secrecy, misinformation and propaganda. The academic and media community in conjunction with the public should deal swiftly with cases that involve restrictions on free discussion. In instances where the media and other democratic institutions have been corrupted, it is needful for independent researchers and the public at large to defend individual human rights and the freedom of speech. A closer look into the global political culture

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reflects the intellectual volatility of the academic halls. There is a communication war, driven by ideological premises, because standards of objectivity have been stripped of their place in regulating critical thought and policy behavior. Therefore, a recurring priority of policymakers should be monitoring the state of education and its adherence to the scientific process. In the end, whoever controls education controls the psyche of the nation. A nation is only as strong as the conscience of her people. Rationality rests in the hands of the observer. Noting this fact together with the accompanied axiomatic references, born out of an autonomous culture reveals the centrality of individual decision-making as an exercise of freedom. Individual autonomy guarantees discrimination. In this context, discrimination is the act of preferring something above all other options. The rights and privileges, associated with an autonomous culture, stand in direct conflict with governments, international organizations, and the media’s mass communication initiatives that rely on conformity.

Sproule [27] advances that ‘whereas the direct persuasion of a speech alerts our critical faculties that someone is trying to win us over, propaganda’s covertness hides the manipulative element in mass communication’. Conformity speaks in the language of ‘I said so’ unlike transformation, which provides the public with the full spectrum of information and allows them to decide the appropriate course of action. Propaganda on the other hand, decides for the public because it assumes the public is too intellectually deficient to decide for themselves. Finally, uniformity of decision is not a sustainable pathway to the equality of peoples and social groups.

3.2. Propaganda clarified

An assumption is an act of taking for granted or supposing a thing without proof. In short, it is the thing supposed or proposition assumed. Another articulation informs that it is a consequence, drawn from the proposition, of which an argument is composed [28]. In other words, an assumption connotes a theory, imagined to account for what is not understood. Alternatively, if the outcome is certain then propaganda is involved. Propaganda then represents the idea of what should be preceding what emerges before it is created. Thus, propaganda is preoccupied with the end product and a planned outcome. Lee [29] goes on to add that at the core of propaganda’s evil nature is the deliberate failure to disclose the source of information. This allows a vehicle for the convenient operationalization of misleading without the mention and assertion of any falsehoods. According to Ross [30], propaganda lacks epistemic merit in instances where it is both false and void of a rational connection between target belief and other beliefs [31–34].

Doob [35] defines the explanatory latitude of propaganda as an ‘aggressive attempt to control the behavior of individuals towards ends, considered unscientific or of doubtful value in a society at a particular time’. Much of what is known about propaganda today is derived from the World War Two experience, therefore it remains of import to consult the principles and tactics implored. A summative account of the 19 principles of propaganda as outlined by the Minister of Enlightenment and Propaganda Joseph Goebbels includes:

1. To be perceived, propaganda must evoke the interest of an audience and must be transmitted through an attention-getting communications medium.
2. Credibility alone must determine whether propaganda output should be true or false.
3. The purpose, content, and effectiveness of enemy propaganda; the strength and effects of exposé; and the nature of current propaganda campaigns determine whether enemy propaganda should be ignored or refuted.
4. Credibility, intelligence, and the possible effects of communications determine whether propaganda materials should be censored.
5. Propaganda must label events and people with distinctive phrases or slogans.
6. Propaganda to the home front must prevent the raising of false hopes, which can be blasted by future events.
7. Propaganda to the home front must create an optimum anxiety level.
8. Propaganda to the home front must diminish the impact of frustration.
9. Propaganda must facilitate the displacement of aggression by specifying the targets for hatred.
Propaganda cannot immediately affect strong counter-tendencies; instead it must offer some form of action or diversion, or both. These principles emerge as the driving forces behind the construction of war propaganda.

3.3. Examining the functional capacity and tactical import of propaganda in totalitarian initiatives

Propaganda has an extensive functional range. Among its most distinctive features is its ability to create and reinforce distrust of one’s own individual thought process [36]. In short, propaganda aims to introduce, sustain and even amplify self-doubt. The end goal of propaganda is a captured conscience. Television, advertising, and entertainment produce misleading pictures and false narratives to communicate a particular message. Contending with false images remains among the most difficult tasks to debunk or decode. O’Shaughnessy [37] identifies the sovereignty of image and growing political symbolization thereof as unavoidable byproducts of the widening social media space. Propaganda goes on to structure thinking within categories based on aggressive labels in place of critical thinking, reasoning, and rationality. Furthermore, the influence of propaganda is most prevalent within societies where ideological reasoning and bargaining have taken precedence over evidence-based thinking, which relies on the objectivity of the scientific method. Specifically, Doob [38] inaugurates an exploration into propaganda that concentrates on the timing and intention of propaganda in affecting the population’s emotions as a prerequisite to inciting action. First and foremost, it is important to recognize that mankind is both thinking and feeling creatures. Having this in mind, it becomes a most necessary skill to know when to activate thinking in comparison with the feeling systems [19, 39–50].

The government is a dangerous instrument, used to wield political power if not tempered by the constitution. Among the first institutions, targeted by misinformation and propaganda, is the justice system, underpinned by constitutional supremacy. Constitutional rights are absolute. Behaviorism does not determine whether rights are enjoyed. Similarly, natural rights are not worked for and simply cannot be earned. And it is the responsibility of the government to protect the natural rights of all its citizens. When evaluating historical atrocities, it is clear, that when governments begin prepping their societies for totalitarian rule, bureaucrats commence with a process of de-individuation. When assessing the totalitarian regimes of old, there seems a clear pathway, provided on how to undermine the administration of justice. Specifically, injustice occurs when justice loses its independence. And justice loses its independence when truth is attacked. Generally, truth and the scientific process that uncovers it, is usually collateral when a tyrannical system of rule is carefully inaugurated. Truth comes coupled with experiential knowledge if it is to graduate in its pursuit of ensuring a pathway to freedom. The truth you know makes you free. You must know truth if you are to enjoy its benefits. Hence, there is danger in ignorance. Even more dangerous than ignorance is the illusion of knowledge. In this regard propaganda works tirelessly to maintain and reinforce the illusion. Cottle [43] elaborates that a propaganda war denotes a range of manipulative practices or techniques, which communicate pervasive messages and slanted languages. Of significance is the mimicry of the form of reason that differentiates propaganda from communication and rational persuasion. This impact is further exacerbated by the emotional appeal in persuasion and accompanying emotional sensitivities with associations. Likewise, together they build compliance irrespective of whether their rationality is largely questionable. Alarming is the lack of public awareness, concerning the source of information driving public policymaking during crises situations that unknowingly drives them to make decisions based on limited and even incorrect information.

All the while internal and external security conditions persist, it is imperative, that human rights and values are not sacrificed on the altar of ‘we violated your rights, for your safety’. Accordingly, discussions that eliminate risk entirely are a cause of concern, especially in the context of vaccine safety and efficacy. Further, South Africa’s disaster management strategy brings to the fore the need to examine the difference between an ideological and an epidemiological dismissal of an idea, solution and or policy. Both intellect and logic, although necessary, cannot provide a sufficient pathway to morality. Recognizing this, the study will be followed by an in-depth assessment of pandemic safety protocol through the lens of deception theory. Overall, the conceptual origin,
applicatory success and nature of propaganda as a defining feature in the atrocities, committed against mankind, was definitively dealt with. If previous patterns are a predictor of future practices, it is necessary to, although optimistic, consider what has happened to societies that have devalued truth in the name of equity, diversity, inclusion and safety. History is patterned. It is foolish to notice parallels and then make the deduction that somehow the current situation will yield different results on account of the word of leaders or the persuasive allure of un-kept promises.

4. Discussion

4.1. The politics of perception through the lens of deception theory

Given the nature of political crises and the heightened propensity to misrepresent information, section four employs deception theory as a lens to understand the influence and motives, directing Covid-19 policy measures. The following variables will be used to examine the effect of propaganda on public health measures and public opinion, concerning their effectiveness. These variables are: deception objective, mechanisms, source of data, informational channels, target and deception awareness. The analysis will focus on mask and vaccine mandates in particular. Key to this section is identifying and systematically explaining how propaganda techniques are used to misrepresent and misdiagnose the issues, preventing the effective management of the Covid-19 pandemic without compromising or violating the individual rights and freedoms of its citizens. The elements of deception theory provide a unitary understanding to how successful deceptions are conducted in the case of the management of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Secrecy protects state authority. Because of democracy, states have less power to control people by force, so now resort to control by conscious manipulation [44]. Soon, new mechanisms and industries developed to control the public mind. Controlling attitudes and beliefs is most important to the state, thus giving birth to the public relations industry. The public relations, propaganda, and the media industry can be used by the state to influence and monitor the belief systems of the public. In warfare, the enemy is concerned with perception. Why does the enemy or adversary seek to affect the population in the realm of perception? Put plainly, your perception influences the world, in which you live. Perception then provokes the human will to make a decision. If you create the right perception, the right decisions will follow. Bell [45] defines the success criteria for effective deception as exceeding the prism of simply fuelling the creation of a perception. Bell goes on to clarify that the success of the deception is primarily dependent upon the target, either taking a particular action or even taking no action at all (Table 1). It bears repeating that communication is the primary medium, used to facilitate interaction between the practitioner and the target. Additionally, the practitioner plays an important role in identifying the indicators, used to inform the target’s perception and decision-making process. In an effort to counter denial and deception Bruce [46] notes the identification of whether the textualist or interpretivist tradition of analysis is being used. Denial operates on the principle of degrading the effectiveness of intelligence collection and then introduces false and misleading information. This paves the way for deception to introduce false and tailored information into intelligence channels intent on influencing judgments.

Deception deconstructed

Daniel and Herbig [47] elucidate that deception is the ‘the deliberate misrepresentation of reality, done to gain a competitive advantage’. This articulation fails to account for deception by omission for instance. Aside from examining deception based on falsehood, it is important to consider deception by truth selectivity. Zimmerman [48] adds that the most successful military operations as it concerns deception are the dependence on a foundation of truth to reinforce and support the falsehoods. Notwithstanding the valuable insights Daniel and Herbig’s definitional ideas provide, ultimately deception is undertaken in pursuit of a particular objective. For the purpose of this study, ‘deception is the deliberate misleading of a target into taking actions prejudicial to the target’s interests by manipulating the target’s decision-making processes through the communication of true, manipulated, distorted, and/or falsified information’[49–51].
Deception objective and mechanism

Table 1
Defining phase one of the deception process: objective and mechanism [52]

| Deception objective | to create an effect in the mind of the target to cause the target to take an action or inaction. |
|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Deception mechanism | concealing mechanisms, which rely on simulation and dissimulation.                                |
|                     | This includes fabrication, manipulation and conditioning.                                       |

Truth must stand in the face of conflicting truth claims. While both statements can be false, both cannot be true at the same time. Simply put, the truth is inconvenient because it invites debate and facilitates the questioning of information. Therefore, a stumbling block to propaganda and disinformation that provides the public with a foundation of their reality that is in the interest of the state. The key is to control the public mind and influence decision-making. In an effort to control the truth, policies, such as the Disaster Management Act (2005), crush institutions that challenge the power of the state and especially weaken law enforcement. Stalin took control of education and rewrote history – ‘control the past and you will control the future’. Likewise, Hitler sought to erase and reframe Germany’s past defeats by blaming all the nation’s problems on the Jewish people.

To effectively control truth, it is necessary to corrupt science. Contrary to popular belief, science can be corrupted and has been corrupted in order to justify historical atrocities against mankind. For instance, the USSR was adamant to dissolve scientific research boards because of its objectivity [53]. More pointedly, ideological dogma influenced Stalin’s view of scientific principles. This meant that facts were ignored if they did not fit the narrative and thereby contribute to the ideological preservation of the USSR. Moreover, scientists were incentivized to ignore scientific facts. Theories of genetics were banned if not compliant with Marxism - fact bending to protect the regime. There can be no higher principle than obedience to the state. Faith in the competency of the state must be higher than the public’s faith in each other or in their own values. Today, the mechanisms, involved in obtaining scientific grants, conflict with objectivity. More pointedly, the past three years have spotlighted the media’s role in informing the public. Hence, the phenomenon of fuelling public distrust, eventually resulting in surrendering power to the state.

Next, it is useful to identify the organizations (the state, media and advertising) the propagandist has at its disposal. To bear fruit, propaganda needs a membership list. In this regard, membership leads to conformability with performing actions as a group member as opposed to an individual. There are member organizations for everybody. This cultural phenomenon feeds on the appeal of self-justification that allows us to retain social prerogatives and deny them to others. A reliance on social information, the perception of traits, and generalizations of behavior are given a platform to be regarded as universal (Table 1). Webber [54] comments that ‘stereotypes create cognitive shortcuts that simplify complexity and ambiguity and absolve us from the intellectual labor of forming balanced judgments’. As a result, it is clear why propagandists use stereotypes. For example, the socialist is a worker hero (a man of the people). Likewise, ‘If you take the vaccine you are saving the world and doing your part for your family and humanity at large’. A careful review of the advertising slogans for encouraging mass vaccination reveals the dominance of this savior complex and rhetoric. While political and national enemies are caricatured, likewise are those who disagree with the masking and vaccine mandates. In fact, info graphics and Facebook profile pictures were used to indicate and publicize compliance with the vaccine rollout and other ideologically justified positions as part of the solidarity campaign. With these factors in mind, the role of stereotyped images in communicating the seeming universality of the propagandist message proves a most effective tactic [55–57].

Deception mechanism: The effects of a propaganda driven public mind

According to Stanley [58] language shapes the thinking and reasoning of public issues. In doing so, it is important to examine the ideological content, embedded in a proposition. O’Shaughnessy [37] posits that one term can condense many meanings and debates. Chomsky [44] points out that in empirical discourse every term has two meanings. The official meaning of democracy versus the technical meaning. If business elements run it, they identify democracy by big corporation’s interest being met. Governments on the other hand, will identify democracy as the ulti-
mate expression of freedom and human rights. Hence, making it necessary to locate its domain of operation. For instance, one must ask what is being implicitly versus explicitly argued because terms and concepts are exploited for ideological purposes. Therefore, one must identify the not at issue content in a proposition as well as the implicit content. The effectiveness lies in its ability to stimulate a unanimous response. By and large, it is necessary to identify the implicit content – that triggers the imagination. If more people can relate to it, it becomes effective and far-reaching in its impact. It follows that what you are refusing to accept is so obviously true but you are in denial. Similarly, it follows that it is just ‘logical’ to take the vaccine without having to prove that it is the only accessible and effective solution. Having this in mind, the proposed public policy measures escape debate and other checks, which should define democratic life [59–51].

The modus operandi, concerning how deception is conducted, provides understanding into how the propagandist is able to influence actions and beliefs through fabrication and manipulation. Fabrication is simply creating false evidence, whereas manipulation allows for the mixing of both factual and exaggerated evidence [62]. These tactics among many others, such as euphemisms and hyperbole, lead to a successful deception operation. Examining the dehumanizing effect of euphemistic language in times of political crises is necessary for the completion of this study. Euphemisms make it easier to deal with and digest reality, especially trauma. Similarly, it spares the people unbearable grief as its soft language seeks to protect the masses. More pointedly, every generation increases in the euphemizing of language. For example: shell-shock became battle fatigue and in the 1959 Korea war it became operational exhaustion (no reference to a human being); sterile and removed any trace of humanity in its articulation. Euphemized terms of old include: concentration camps, which are actually death chambers and casualties, used to politely describe avoidable civilian death. Current euphemized terms, used during the pandemic, include ‘vaxxed’ and the ‘jab’. It is evident that linguistic tactics have helped to mask tyrannical and deceptive intentions. A careful application of different techniques reveals the power of language and politics in altering the perception of the public in hopes that they voluntarily cede their freedom in the name of solidarity instead of science. The tension between ideology and science has never been more apparent than in the discourse, concerning Covid-19.

Lasswell [63] elucidates on the effects of conscience splitting: the individual relinquishes their value standards and substitutes the directives and pressures of the regime. The propagandist aim is that you abandon your values. For instance, examples of internal dialogue include: ‘I am in no position to do much myself’, ‘this may blow over’, notwithstanding tyrannical behavior does not blow over less confronted. It grows stronger. Eventually, the language of command in rigid ceremonial observances displaces the casual yet monopolistic use of propaganda by the ruling regime (Table 2). It follows that the ideal mass reacts on cue without reflection, thinking and without deviation [37]. The propagandist seeks to paint a situation or political crisis as hopeless because hopelessness births inactivity. According to King Solomon, hope deferred makes the heart sick [64]. To put it another way, hopelessness immobilizes humanity. Effective propaganda elicits the following response ‘I cannot do anything about it, I am isolated and alone’. Hopelessness paves the way for tyranny and total submission to the government. Propaganda says: ‘see what is happening and how bad it is…’, therefore you must comply. When did it become socially unacceptable to question public health decisions or make independent decisions for one’s personal health? Does democracy mean that the media is always presumed to be on the side of the people, or at least for the sake of the integrity of their commitment to inform and not indoctrinate? Aside from the domestic and international media houses, the social media space has induced a culture of self-censorship and surveillance, which discourages dialogue and the free exchange of ideas. For this reason, the technological attack on free speech must be treated with greater seriousness [65–67].

Sources of data and information and Channels

| Sources of data and information | multiple sources inform credibility, reliability and context |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| Channels                      | timing and delivery are planned by the media and independent doctors and analysts |

Table 2

Examining phase two: identifying the sources of data and channels, involved in a deception operation [52]
Media

Table 2 echoes the importance of identifying the information channels responsible for the planned transmission of political communication to the public. In short, communication is essentially controlled by the media. It follows that the message, the quality, meaning, and essence of communication fall under media custodianship. Notably, the source controls the message therefore the object of the message will get it wrong if the media gets it wrong. In other words, how the media constructs an argument affects the public’s comprehension thereof. It remains important to evaluate the message, given as opposed to simply relying on the credibility of the medium. History records at length how the media can corrupt, clarify, convert, pervert, protect, or destroy the integrity of the message [43]. It is safe to assume, that the media controls what the receiver hears, thinks, believes, and understands. Consequently, the medium is the most powerful thing in communication. Simply put, the media derives its power from its primary purpose – the transmission of ideas. While the media largely informs public opinion as an independent mechanism of the democratic state, the extent, to which it identifies as the propaganda arm of the state in times of crisis to keep the citizens in check, must be determined.

The appeal of modern propaganda is concentrated in the media’s need for a condensed story with a hero, a villain and morale, so the press is enlisted as a participant in the propaganda battle. The demand for a story is inherent in press culture. O’Shaughnessy [37] goes on to add that it becomes an imperative necessity of news production and humanity’s deep-seated need for the myths that give structure and meaning to events of life. When evaluating the content the media puts out it is necessary to identify ideologically interpreted concepts. This process avoids the public falling prey to the consistent framing of threats within the context of existentialism, sensationalization, and academic exaggeration. The media together with the education sector are beset with existentialist narratives, while knowing the human tendency to overemphasize negative information. When the public is dissuaded from facts and emotions are becoming the focal point of media analysis instead of your rational faculty, deception is most likely involved. Subsequently, the propensity for pessimism increases. Bailey and Tupy [68] posit that pessimism is the sale item of the news. In short, human beings are keen consumers of bad news and pessimism. Hence, it is to the benefit of the media to put out content in the maximally attention-grabbing form possible. Bad news is sudden, immediate, and unexpected. Owing to its nature, it necessitates major behavioral modification. Human beings have an inherent desire for variety. Hence, the recognition that for politics to be effective, the leisure market must be invaded [37]. In other words, renting the allegiance of voters now becomes a political necessity. The loyalty of voters is rented before the public moves on to more pressing matters. Based on the oversaturated leisure market, politicians also concentrate on how to gain consumers. Still, the media remains the primary outlet for availing its persuasion territory for occupation. O’Shaughnessy [37] concludes that persuasion becomes embedded in a political culture where authority is negotiated.

Chomsky and Herman [69] posit that the media has helped to create or destroy social movements, justify wars, tempered financial crises, and spurred some ideological current. In this way, the use of propaganda enables the media to atomize its audience. Further, the isolation created facilitates an uninterrupted monologue between you and your television, you and the news media. In the case of both the domestic and international management of the Covid-19 pandemic, isolation, social distancing and social media censorship have solidified public dependence on the news media as the only authority and custodian of truth. Not only this, while social distancing has shrunk the space for dialogue, Big Tech has sought to police freedom of speech under the banner of misinformation. As previously stated, the end goal of deception is a decision or indecision. Notably, both incur a cost. Chomsky and Herman [69] interestingly note a parallel where the freer a society, the more propaganda industries will arise to suppress it. In this context, the freedom spoken of represents freedom from want, terror, freedom from fear and the freedom of speech. These institutions must be fiercely protected or they will be unknowingly forfeited. In the year 2021, global leaders are content to have seminars on democracy, congratulating one another on their ‘achievements’ and cleverly rehearsed pronouncements, while they deny the people the very expression of the essence of democratic choice and freedom to exercise that choice without fear or discrimination.
This makes for the normalization of counterfeit democracies. These are settled only by the beauty of ideological fantasies, which seldom touch the surface of real life, whose solutions bear no tangible and life-changing impact, its theorists espouse. Before any propaganda plan gains traction, the propagandist requires something to hate and someone to blame. Division is paramount. Instead of racial segregation, the pandemic introduced medical segregation. Among the first triggers of suspicious government behavior is segregation, normalized under the language of safety and public compliance [70–72].

To grasp the success of the propaganda project, the centrality of the de-individuation process must be clearly articulated. Webber [54] highlights the importance of social conditions and self-awareness as defense mechanisms against propaganda. He points out that reduced self-awareness means that we are less likely to act in accord with our values. First and foremost, de-individuation emerges the supreme propagandist tactic. The process of de-individuation is a result of stimulus conditions, including immersion in a group, physical or social anonymity by arousing or distracting conditions [73]. In these conditions, individuals are less likely to be influenced by personal integrity.

Moore [74] describes conditioning as the repeated presentations of signals, information, de-sensitizing analytical elements, no longer viewed with calm. To emphasize this, it is necessary to provide an explanation for the almost complete disregard of tyrannical behavior by the government. For example, the repetitive fabrication of false information and the manipulation of true information along with diversionary tactics (repeatedly) prevented the Germans from successfully taking advantage of plans, ‘lost’ by the Allies during World War II [74]. Following the process of conditioning, it is usually a diversion, which draws an adversary’s attention away from an area, event or activity. Additionally, open feedback channels are needed to observe victim reactions to monitor when the deception is complete. Earlier, it was noted, that propaganda requires a membership list because it provides the ideal setting for diversion to occur. The propagandist or architect of deception must then create an antagonistic relationship between the groups, hence the vaccinated versus unvaccinated. The division is necessary to establish politicized representations of good versus evil, helpful versus selfish, rational versus irrational behavior. This is an enabling platform for the normalization of tyrannical behavior in overriding individual decision-making faculties and processes.

### Diversion: locating the enemy

Sproule [36] expands that hate and fear occupy a central focus in both media and state propagandistic arsenals. By extension, the process of public condemnation and rejection is then aided by the aggressive labeling of individuals, groups, policies, practices and beliefs. Further, labeling enables and reinforces the stigmatizing process where certain names that acquire unattractive associations become normalized (Table 4). O’Shaughnessy [37] writes that today’s political culture is infamous for name-calling that avoids dialogue because the already presumed truth has no opposition, especially that from a layman. Name-calling suspends the need to discuss an issue simply because the propagandist pre-supposes that, which first needs to be proved. The individual assumes that what they are defending is an obvious truth, which further relieves them of providing evidence to support their rehearsed solution – ‘the vaccine is safe and effective’. More pointedly, the ideological shift comes primarily through education. Thereafter, the assumed obvious truth is relieved of having to carry the burden of proof. As long as impressive generalities persist, the propagandist exploits his/her proximal associations and policy positions with virtue signaling concepts, such as truth and social solidarity, embedded within an emotionally driven consciousness. In this way, the propagandist ensures the ease of relocation as it concerns the redistribution of authoritative influence from one object or subject to another. It is typical of a propagandist organization or entity to caution against misinformation and disinformation, while being the biggest perpetrator and distributor thereof. Beginning with testimonial, it is to the propagandist benefit to relate the solution or policy to a specified and respected institution. Usually, the leaders seek to address the audience as ‘one of them’ in order to establish relatability to the plight of the suffering South African. The main effort then is to use language and rhetorical devices, such as hyperbole, euphemisms, and metaphors, which puts a spin on the propagandist policy position [36]. Uncommunicated distortions and omissions contribute to the development of an illusion and or perception that allows the public to endure the inconvenience of inconvenient information and half-truths. In keeping with the bandwagon, the propagandist is careful to evoke the intellectual companionship of the entire public and nation at large. In other words, the propagandist develops a campaign that allows people to follow the crowd

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**Table 4**

| O’Shaughnessy [37] | Describes conditioning as the repeated presentations of signals, information, desensitizing analytical elements, no longer viewed with calm. |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Webber [54]       | Highlights the importance of social conditions and self-awareness as defense mechanisms against propaganda.                    |
| Moore [74]        | Describes conditioning as the repeated presentations of signals, information, desensitizing analytical elements, no longer viewed with calm. |
in accepting the state’s public policy provisions as it concerns masking and taking the vaccine simply because ‘everybody is doing it’ (Table 3). A false unanimity, created and strengthened because of the propagandistic function of mass media and the deliberate exclusion of dissenting voices.

Table 3
Examining the media’s attitudinal disposition toward vaccine hesitancy

| Pro-vaxxer          | Anti-vaxxer          |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| Saviour             | Enemy                |
| Compliant           | Non-compliant        |
| Rational            | Irrational           |
| Caring              | Selfish              |
| Healthy             | Diseased             |
| Rights re-awarded   | Undeserving, rights restricted |
| Financial incentives| Job loss             |

Table 4
The effects of propaganda and name-calling on fuelling social group hostility in pursuit of the dehumanization of the ‘other’

| Insider                              | Outsider                                      |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Germans were ethnically pure         | Jews were ethnically impure                   |
| Germans were hard-working            | Jews were job stealers                        |
| Hutus were superior in appearance    | Tutsis were called cockroaches (inyenzi)       |
| Whites were hardworking              | Blacks were lazy                              |

Table 4 illustrates the centrality of the aggressive labeling and categorization process at the core of any depersonalization and dehumanization project. At the forefront of any atrocity, committed against mankind, lurks the initial and seemingly innocent segregation of the public. This segregation is based on observable decision-making behavior, facilitated by the state and media in order to monitor public compliance with the given rules and regulations. Historically, governments have relied on name-calling and aggressive classification as a precursor to social group division and hostility (Fig. 1). Hostility, left unattended, is a dormant incubation mechanism for blame, resentment and ultimately violence to be extracted when public dissatisfaction can no longer be met through peaceful means. An antagonistic relationship must ensue among the public that way the state is able to maintain its position as a ‘neutral arbiter’. The state and media work to control truth by identifying an enemy of the public and then exhaust its resources, platforms and institutional legitimacy to misdiagnose crises and maintain social control.

According to Mercola and Cummins [76], presently ‘pandemics and the threat of infectious outbreaks and bioterrorism are the new tools of war and social control’. Because of this social hostility, it is much easier to call someone you disagree with a name than it is to examine the integrity of the claims being presented. Importantly, the disease imagery both fuels and justifies segregation. Broadly, the emotional manipulation of propaganda provides the seamless ignoring of linguistic tactics that facilitate the casual irrelevance of supporting arguments. Bartlett [77] elucidates that hidden in the emotional dimension of propaganda’s persuasive character is the apparent epistemic dearth and illogical informational irregularities (Table 5). When evaluating the tension between societal groups, disgust emerges as a more sophisticated tool than fear where fear at least manages to retain an element of respect. In contrast, anything outside the domain of purity and the common good is deemed disgusting. In the World War Two context, the propaganda ministry ensured that the Jews were branded with disgust [48]. Therefore, education and the degree of sophistication with regard to the population’s collective intellectual insights do not decrease their propensity to commit evil. This understanding dismantles the idea that education heightens public awareness against the deceptive prowess of intellectuals and their propagandistic messages. In other words, civilization is not enough to constrain an individual’s ability to do evil. Again, this illustrates the power of imagery as a source of public coercion and eventual compliance [78, 79].

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It is clear, that while multiple sources inform credibility, South Africa’s management of the Covid-19 pandemic sought to delegitimize informational verification mechanisms. A stringent commitment to state ordained sources only as owning the monopoly on truth strengthens public distrust of health and media institutions. The state and media have worked to control truth, suppress uncooperative voices and the need for dialogue as it concerns health, medical freedom and free speech. Additionally, it shows how the media creates and politicizes division in society to serve as a distraction. Finally, this distraction and public disillusionment makes it unnecessary to engage in a rational discussion as it concerns the efficacy of state mandated vaccine policy positions.

4.4 Deception target and target deception awareness

Table 5
Phase three of the deception process: Identifying the deception target [52]

| Deception target | Information creates a situation perception that is coherent, consistent, with context and wrong. Selectively conceals information to control target perception. |
|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Target deception awareness | A. Know analytic biases, assumptions, preconceptions and expectations.  
B. Know your adversary (the order of deception, manipulating intention). |

A. Discrepancies and failures of Covid-19 policy measures

Schwab and Malleret [80] confirm that in comparison to previous pandemics, Covid-19 is the least lethal in nature. Considering the lethality and mortality of Covid-19, it follows that the virus itself is not the chief reason for the uptake of Covid-19 hospitalizations and deaths. Mercola and Cummins [76] note that ‘Covid-19 is a highly transmissible biological trigger that magnifies and intensifies preexisting chronic diseases and comorbidities’. Given this understanding, it is clear, that the virus concentrates on amplifying and exploiting other underlying serious diseases with consequent high mortality, which are common place within a given population. Mercola and Cummins [76] point out that ‘people are dying with Covid-19 as opposed to dying from it’.

According to the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [81] ‘even conceding the inaccuracy of testing and exigencies of fatality classification – the survivability rate is 99.997 percent for 0–19 years, 99.98 percent for 20–49 years, 99.5 percent for 50–69 years, and 94.6 percent for 70–plus years. The threat to school-aged kids approaches zero. The more information we get, the more normal the SARS-CoV-2 pathogen seems. It’s a respiratory and flu-like illness that became pandemic before becoming endemic, just like so many other respiratory viruses over the last hundred years’.
A recurring priority in intelligence analysis is identifying the factors that compromise the integrity of information, provided to the public. Johnston [82] makes the case that analysis is both a product of cognition and itself is a cognitive process. Bruce [46] goes on to add that intelligence analysis is time-sensitive and that information may intentionally be deceptive therefore time and nature must be consulted. Additionally, there are other domains with time constraints that force decisions to be made without conclusive data. As seen during the pandemic, the masking policy for instance was instituted on the basis of the precautionary principle. However, since its three year anniversary there has been no controlled experiments run that testify to its safety properties and effectiveness. To put it plainly, it is the policymakers’ political imperative to make decisions, to act quickly and with confidence. The extent, to which the immediacy of crisis abdicates the critical thinking process and tradeoffs associated with certain solutions, must be weighed correctly.

Cull [43] elaborates that both complexity and uncertainty impede a decision and that digesting careful analysis increases the time and thought involved. Therefore, the policymaker is more likely to prefer papers that are simple, punchy and conclusively attention will usually focus on the question. According to Cull [83], analysts are frustrated by the misuse or disuse of what they produce. As a result, contradictions arise between the dynamics of the analytical process and the decision-making process between professional norms and political unity. Hence, growing tension between the qualities, required for accuracy in analysis, and those, required for influence. There is a difference. Importantly, analysts produce a paper that reflects reality in all its complexity and ambiguity that does not distort facts by oversimplifying them and that reveals the broad range of possible futures, left open by circumstance. The analytical process must remain vigilant of the incompatibility of ideological assumptions, which desire to co-exist in an imprecise verbal presentation [21]. Evidence of scientific (truth-seeking) procedures and their respective degrees of precision vary in different disciplines. Even though the social sciences remain uniquely vulnerable to objective analysis, it must therefore make every effort to identify and remove ideologically conditioned error from the analysis. Noticeably, formulating an attack provides an impetus for factual and analytical work even if ideology interferes with it.

B. Know your adversary

A keen awareness of prior knowledge of an adversary’s means of deception (division, censoring, and segregation) is essential to deception. The paper aims to clarify the roles of both the government and media in providing unbiased information and advice, however, caution against the abuse of that power. To put it plainly, the abuse of power is when intellectuals, the media and state officials proceed to demand that the public make certain decisions without properly considering the consequent moral, ethical and medical implications. There is a price in conceding individual freedom – whether apparent or invisible – there is a cost. It is necessary to explore the techniques under social nationalism and communism in Russia, concerning voluntarily ceding authority to the government to make decisions in favor of the common good. Does the Covid-19 crisis merit abdicating ethical principles in government decision-making for collective good? Common good? Public good? Delegitimizing valid vaccine related concerns and dismissing them as ‘anti-vax opinion’, misinformation and disinformation is alarming. Reputably, the suppression of information, deliberate exclusion of risk, misrepresentation of statistics and deaths fuel vaccine hesitancy. Because scientists and the media are not reporting the risks, associated with the vaccine, does not mean they are non-existent. Nor is it strange that politicians manipulate science to advance political ends – eugenics bears testimony to this. Strikingly, history bears a painful record of scientific manipulation for political ends.

4. 5. Target

It is useful to understand propaganda as democratic dogmatism [84]. Next, to manufacture consent you need a target, an enemy. After locating the common enemy, fear is used as a tool to control public opinion. Based on media theory, consent is being manufactured all around you all the time [69]. Then, division usually happens in the following categories where differences are automatically characterized as injustice and indicative of masked oppression. Differences do not automatically result in inferiority but through the lens of ideology, any mischaracterization is pos-
The propagandist establishes a division between different interest groups by pitting competing interests against one another. How can free societies be converted into tyrannical regimes? Identify the enemy and mobilize society against that enemy (Fig. 1). Divide and conquer, an oldie but a goodie. For instance, separate development to avoid conflict as opposed to substandard development as seen in the case of Apartheid’s justification. A people so different because of ethnicity, culture and yes the weaponization of pigmentation.

Among its many victories, propaganda has mastered the art of winning a conversation without having it entirely. Those who are favorably known as ‘vaxer or pro-vax’ are assumed to be defending an obvious truth. However, every assertion and or claim must be proven to be true. What is the point of education and dialogue if not to contest different ideas and their practical capacity and efficacy? Simply put, a statement is not just true because it has been repeated. Similarly, it is not true just because an expert said it – the claim must be proven. Validity cannot rest in repetition but must stand against opposing arguments. The danger of repetition as sufficient evidence of a truth-seeking claim must not be understated.

Because of propaganda’s historical baggage, it is more appropriate to locate common propositions. Although propaganda is flawed, it is certainly not redundant. Propaganda proceeds as if the question they were dealing with were solved [85]. The propagandist cleverly makes it seem as though it is downright pointless to even engage in the conversation when the matter is settled, as told you before. Why are we even having a discussion about vaccine hesitancy and repercussions, ‘do you want to die?’ It follows that you are irresponsible, selfish and an enemy of the public good if you refuse to agree with the state and media stance on vaccine efficacy. Evidently, propaganda assumes that the issue is solved before the discussion ever takes place.

Target Deception Awareness
All warfare is based on deception. Examining the aim of info-war propaganda is of utmost priority. For this study, the primary objective of deception is to get the enemy (anti-vaxxer) to surrender. Secondly, to create an intellectual climate hostile to the opposition and intolerant to a different opinion. Both cancel culture and political correctness, are phenomena that attest to language redefinition as warfare. Items as cards, guaranteeing safe conduct, are critical and so is the ubiquitous fear appeal when people are conceived with personal survival. Fear allows for an alliance with the powerful. Altruism represents the unsellish concern for the welfare of others. Motives and notions of social duty are also critical. Blau [86] alludes to the concept of reward to embrace intangibles like social approval, esteem, respect and power over others. The vaccinated are on the side of those who want to return to normalcy. Freedom is a luxury. History reveals that freedom is not the norm, instead freedom had to be fought for on intellectual and physical battlegrounds. Most commonly, freedom was withheld to prevent the independence of thought from the bondage of subjective realities.

Masking truth: the road to de-mask us
While there is an almost unanimous agreement that the Covid-19 virus is real, it is argued, that its effects and lethality are grossly exaggerated. Initially, the Centre for Disease Control (CDC) reports confirmed that Covid-19 is 99.07 % survivable, however they have now retracted such information [81]. Also, the legitimacy and accuracy of the PCR testing process must be called into question after reports spiraled, concerning false positives. According to the CDC (2019):

‘At present, the polymerase chain reaction test is the primary method, used to test people for COVID-19. The problem with that is twofold. First of all, the PCR test cannot distinguish between inactive viruses and ‘live’ or reproductive ones. This is a crucial point, since inactive and reproductive viruses are not interchangeable in terms of infectivity. If you have a non-reproductive virus in your body, you will not get sick and you cannot spread it to others. For this reason, the PCR test is grossly unreliable as a diagnostic tool’.

In terms of government measures, taken to protect the public, it is troubling, that scientists and public health officials, domestic and abroad alike, have continuously changed their position as it concerns the efficacy of mask wearing for instance. Notably, Dr Fauci among the leading voices in Covid-19 policy regulation said that ‘masks do not work, they simply ease fear’. That is not a scientific reason. He has since distanced himself from his initial position to a far distant one that
argues that one mask is simply not sufficient. Evidently, there are alternate political and socio-economic agendas at play in hijacking these crises for alternate ends.

This section explores whether ideology or epidemiology is the prevailing force in governing South Africa’s public health strategy. Public health decisions, taken in the name of safety, must be subject to analysis with the purpose of interrogating the empirical evidence backing it. Are masks effective in controlling the spread of Covid-19? The mask wearing policy begs whether its origins are based in ideology or rooted in epidemiology. Burnett [87] put it this way, propaganda is ‘discourse in the service of ideology’. Masks were mandated in the name of ‘do what you can’, even if it does not have any bearing on Covid-19 transmission. Simply put, mask wearing serves as a public indicator of compliance. Mask wearing as a public policy measure has no epidemiological bearing on reducing Covid-19 transmission, and is simply kept in place as a mechanism to monitor public compliance. For example, the Nazi’s forcing Jews to wear a yellow star, which is indicative of their perceived lesser humanity.

A severe lack of risk stratification is responsible for the mismanagement of Covid-19. Masking was continuously pushed back on a monthly basis, so as to suggest that the government is able to preplan outcomes of infections. The arbitrary moving dates of lifting masking suggests that decisions are not based on fact, reason and evidence, but ‘what the state says goes as the protective father of its citizen’s welfare’. Subsequently, ‘if you care, do what we say’. Fear damages the ability of individuals to make conscious decisions and increases their dependence on information, provided by external authorities. The reliance on external authorities for key information without having equipped the citizenry with the analytical arsenal, needed to assess the quality of political communication, is a recipe for voluntary societal obedience to tyrannical leadership and policy measures. It is essential to acknowledge, that external authorities have interests that do not necessarily always align with public health and welfare. As such, interests must be vetted and carefully considered.

How the virus functions and transmits was masked for epidemiological reasons. Initially, masklessness was presented as a reward for taking the vaccine. This represents an error of cognitive dissonance: are the good people the people without masks? Fear is embedded in the language of safety, inclusion, compassion and solidarity. Thus, science must be used to articulate the nature of the virus and actions that can be taken to prevent its spread. Noticeably, the scientific response to Covid-19 has been hijacked by a response, which plausibly intersects. In principle, vaccines are relevant to controlling a pathogen when it blocks its transmission, which in the case of Covid-19, the vaccines do not block transmission. Because of its newness and bypassing the general period of vaccine production, there are undoubtedly unknown risks. It is important to evaluate the language, used by politicians and public health professionals, concerning the role of mandates and legislation in ‘controlling the spread of the virus.’ Here the word control implies a naïve understanding of mechanization and its ability to institute policy measures, which can limit the spread of a virus. Masking as a precautionary principle and later a permanent feature of the policy arsenal to curb the spread of Covid-19 is bolstered and protected by the worst case scenario principle. This reflects the perils of a postmodern mask mandate. If you think it helps, wear it and if not then do not wear it. This is derived from the rhetoric that encourages the supremacy of your lived experience as the ultimate legitimating factor and claim to truth. Either masking is scientifically effective or it is not. Examining the postmodern influence on pandemic policymaking is key to understanding the incongruities in evidence, underpinning the management of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Vaccine hesitancy

There is a perception of Covid-19 as a global killing machine that is grossly inconsistent with its factual properties, lethality and recovery rates. Interrogating the perception of Covid-19 as a killing machine reveals the mischaracterization and misrepresentation of scientific realities. When considering the death rate of the flu, it is clear, that its lethality continues to surpass that of Covid-19. Does Covid-19 have the killing strength we are told it has? Who is responsible for the perception of the public? The media. What happens when the media has portrayed an inaccurate and inconsistent representation of the pandemic as it concerns the lethality and mortality of the virus and all its variants? A perception has been created, leading the public to make a decision. An uninformed and misinformed decision, and shame, imposed on indecision. People are under
the impression that if they contract Covid-19 or its variants, immediate death will follow. The dominating assumption is fear based and not fact based. The overriding belief and mass hysteria is compounded by the media’s sensitizing tactics and the overwhelming dominance of existentialist narratives, carefully curated to force or shame individuals into complying with government vaccine and mask mandates. How is it possible that since the pandemic has started, there have been no controlled experiments to test the efficacy of mask wearing?

People live in perception as their reality – irrespective of fact. People needed something they could do – individual action as a comforting mechanism when scientifically and factually speaking the mask bears no protective capacity from an invisible virus. The media and large parts of the scientific community have created the image that masking works and they have manipulated human psychology and used fear to do it. Fear creates a survival mentality, where every decision is based on the premise of life or death.

Conventionally speaking, it takes 10 years to produce a vaccine. Having said that, it is necessary to investigate the risks, associated with fast tracking a process of this kind. Propaganda, fear mongering and the selective relaxing of restrictions and number tampering when it serves government ends must be dealt with. Let alone discouraging other efficient treatments, such as ivermectin and fluvoxide, which have little known side effects. To ease concerns, governments and media could have had a round table where a number of doctors are left to debate the risks and benefits, associated with vaccines. But to exclude the acknowledgement and discussion of risks entirely and instead engage in the propagandistic branding of public concerns as irrational and even stupid is deeply disturbing. Of course there are risks, the mere fast tracking of vaccine production attests to this fact. As such, it remains the media’s responsibility to inform and not indoctrinate the public. The key difference is that informing allows for the presentation of factual information and engaging experts on their body of knowledge. This includes the full picture, trade-offs includ-ed. Notwithstanding that expert opinion commands a shallow place in the hierarchy of evidence based-medicine. Indoctrination on the other hand, relies on jamming, repetition and ultimately con-version. Political science as opposed to science seems to be exerting an overwhelming dominance on international and domestic vaccine campaigns. Much of the campaigns follow the following rhetoric ‘you did a responsible thing to get vaccinated’ – note the emphasis on social responsibility. More pointedly, irrespective of social responsibility, is it medically responsible? The socialistic nature of the vaccine rollout attempts to erode and delegitimize the individuals’ capacity to make decisions for personal health and security.

Because there is instability everywhere, the account of reality that best describes this constant state of fluctuation must be identified. Government, censoring any and all information that could create vaccine hesitancy, is a threat to the quality of democracy and human dignity. As it concerns categorical safety, vaccines are safe and effective but also have crippling side effects, some of which are worse than the actual disease. Notably, people who suffered these effects cannot sue pharmaceuticals for these effects. This is because pharmaceutical companies have every incentive to cut back on the production of existing drugs and reduce investment to find solutions for new drugs. Overcoming vaccine hesitancy implies discarding your current beliefs and logic because you do not believe and think in line with the dominant media narrative. Restricting the economic and social free-dom of the unvaccinated to encourage them to do the socially responsible thing and get vaccinat-ed. Politicizing health exposes the tension between the notion of individuality and group identity in society (race or sex). The slow but planned erosion of individual capability to make decisions, concerning their own health. Griffin [88] notes that humanity is defined by their capacity for agency: ‘deliberating, assessing, choosing, and acting to make what we see as a good life for ourselves’. To put it another way, the twin commitment of human rights is seen in its defense of normative agency and the exercise thereof. Crisis comes to test the strength of our democracy. Therefore, the exclusion of democratic principles and constitutional supremacy in a crisis type situation, such as that imposed by Covid-19, to some degree reflects the satisfaction with dem-oocratic rhetoric as sufficient without the actual practice of democracy. Freedom of speech, free-dom of bodily autonomy seems to be under threat in the name of protecting social democracy. The effects of government and corporate coercion in attacking individual livelihoods to make
medical decisions illustrates the success of a polarized public where individuals are shamed and ostracized for defending their health and their right to question the scientific validity of proposed health policies. Overall, the gradual disintegration of human rights for temporary purposes can have long-term implications.

5. Implications

The purpose of education is not to teach you what to think but to teach you how to think. There is a massive difference between the two. One creates dependency and the other freedom. One creates a slave, while the other creates a citizen. Consulting opposing arguments impress the need to both listen and read in order to prioritize understanding before disputing claims. Science is not absolute, science is based on observation. Observations change based on new insights. It is important to consult the full range of scientific claims without excluding those based on ideological orientation as opposed to scientific validity. Every decision and or policy comes with unavoidable tradeoffs. Government and media silence on these tradeoffs does not deny their consequences from birthing visible manifestations. Should seasons of political and health crises remove the need for open dialogue? Contrary, free speech and open debate should be encouraged to prevent the rise of totalitarian governments. Correctly identifying and qualifying the impact of postmodernism, ideology and propaganda on knowledge creation, management and distribution is of utmost importance as it concerns the maintenance of peace and security. The quality of political communication, received by different organizations, must be weighed, measured and interrogated if it is to impact national governance and policymaking as it relates to disaster management.

6. Conclusion

Truth is not a majoritarian enterprise. Likewise, science is not consensus-driven. Even so, science should be truth-seeking. However, there seems to be an intentional push toward these thought processes in times of political uncertainty. The research has shown that propaganda has triumphed over epidemiology in guiding South Africa’s Covid-19 public policy measures. Again, the friction between politics and science has never been more frank than in the discourse, concerning Covid-19. Specifically, both mask-wearing and the vaccine rollout are among the chief policy measures, which seem to ignore empirical evidence in favor of ideological persuasiveness. To be effective, propaganda relies on coded language and mass communication. Hence, the strength of state mandated Covid-19 policy measures is rooted in the legitimacy of its transportation mechanism that allows genuine concerns and questions to go unaddressed. Further, it involves the manufacture of falsehood, fabrication, and deceit in pursuit of perception management as seen in the public’s response to Covid-19 policy measures. Again, the end goal of perception management is action or inaction. Deception on the other hand, speaks to the abuse of the rational process that hinders information sharing. Further, the study shows that propaganda can manifest as denial by preventing an opposition policy position from emerging, thus rinsing any negative perspective that might contaminate mainstream media. The study also offers an account of censorship that depicts the intellectual self-policing of the media, government and Big Tech companies in an effort to control truth. More pointedly, outrage needs an enemy, to which propaganda invites the public to share in the mutual charade of anger, shame and blame. This intellectually hostile climate exposes the danger of one narrative that runs unopposed and uncontested. In this article, the propagandist polarized society by politicizing health – us versus them rhetoric in order to alleviate the state, scientific community and media from factual accountability. This study has shown the effects of using language to intentionally lessen a major scenario or decision as it concerns medical freedom and the freedom of speech. Overall, it signals the importance of evaluating the credibility of political communication, especially during times of global political confusion and instability.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.
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