

# **NARRATIVES, MESSAGES, SYMBOLS**

## **1. Burdens of proof for message arguments**

- a) Describe the message- Mistakes: do not use generic terms such as backlash, legitimacy, glorification and antagonism. The problem is people do not describe what each of these terms actually means.
- b) What is the likely interpretation of the message- Mistakes: People tend to assume the message will be interpreted the way they want it to be. Prove why your interpretation is likely.
- c) Can you get the message across/be persuasive? (Part of (b))
- d) What is the delta?- Need to prove a significant change in people's perception as a result of the messaging. Common mistake is to prove that a perception that already exists which ignores that people have opinions that are influenced by other external factors- this is true for most backlash arguments. "Bigoted people will see a liberal policy and become bigoted"- have a clear burden in the argument and what actually changes.
- e) What action are people likely to take? - Common mistake is to use the messaging as the bottom line eg. people will become sexist. Very hard to win debate on what happens in people's minds

## **2. Describing the Message**

- a) Be as detailed as possible given time limits

Eg. TH, as the LGBT+ community, would cancel the Pride Parade

Prop- Pride is antagonising to many people and could lead to homophobia.

Here, antagonising doesn't say much.

How to detail it?- In the Pride Parade, people are likely to be hypersexual because of the provocativeness of the movement and the emphasis on sexual norms. Therefore, the Pride Parade can be labelled as hypersexual. Alternatively, the Left wants to politicise it and display loads of flags and banners, this directly antagonises the Right by giving them clear and direct symbols that affront them.

Strategic layer to detail: Include every part of the detail that contributes to your bottom line (eg. antagonism) and exclude what isn't contributing to your bottom line or what is harmful to your bottom line. Two things: a) helps with efficiency and time management b) gives opp lines to counter you explicitly.

- b) Consider the deliverer/narrative of the message- This impacts what the message looks like and helps you analyse why it might be good for you.

Eg. THBT feminist organisations should emphasise the narrative that beauty doesn't matter over the narrative that all bodies are beautiful

It is worthwhile here to use that the actor that is advocating the message is the feminist movement who has the incentive to serve women's rights.

Opp- because this is the feminist movement, this won't be a shallow depiction that says that the only thing that matters is beauty but instead look at this beautiful, brave transgender woman. In depicting different bodies that are different from the mainstream, I will add positive nuance

c) What is the setting/platform for the message?

There is a huge difference between seeing a march on the street explicitly and seeing a march on the news. The way the message comes across is significantly different.

d) What words/mechanisms in the motion help you?

It is fine to just talk about the message in the vacuum. It is better to say what changes in the message through the motion.

Eg. THW destroy statues that commemorate national heroes that have committed immoral acts  
Can analyse the existence or nonexistence of these statues themselves. A stronger mechanism is to consider that these statues are being DESTROYED- how much discourse around this, how much backlash this might lead to

**3. What is the likely interpretation of the message/narrative? (also can we persuade people in the first place? WHO IS THE RECIPIENT?)**

First stakeholder-recipient of the message

- a) The single most influential factor of interpretation of a message is the question of who the recipient is.
- b) What are the existing preconceptions of the recipients?- Do they tend to already agree with me (or) disagree with me? If they do agree, then getting the message across is easy, if they don't, they are less likely to be susceptible.
- c) How critical is the recipient themselves?- Difference between getting the message across to college students than a room of 5 year olds. The ease of passing the message and the nuance I am able to deliver is significantly different.
- d) What is the relationship between the deliverer and the recipient?- Are they a figure of authority such as a parent or teacher? If they are, the recipient is likely to agree because has agreed for a lot of things. Are they an opposing political party member?- then, am unlikely to be receptive

Other considerations

a) What are the other existing messages?

Eg. THO depictions of women who fight back against men who were previously violent to them  
Opp- depicts women as strong in the media. However, this isn't very specific because other messages exist that do this.

Could also be used to help us: in many cases, there are messages that are similar to us that could be used as associations.

THO the depictions of soldiers as heroes. We are used to seeing heroes fight villains. We are used to seeing anyone who attacks heroes as villains. Intuitively, if we depict soldiers as heroes, we can demonise opposition soldiers which is good. (Nav note: weighing on national pride and buy-in to the military?)

b) Consider the way discourse around the message will be shaped

In many motions about safe spaces or trade off between hate speech and freedom of speech.

Eg. THR the rise of no-platform culture on college campuses (not platforming “problematic” speakers)

Gov- Argue for just a free exchange of ideas that leads us to the truth in the end. Might also argue that the message isn’t just the lecture itself but also Jordan Peterson isn’t giving the lecture in a vacuum but giving a lecture in front of critical, liberal college students. Therefore, we get a free exchange of ideas.

Opp- But wait, you don’t get a lot of these opinions expressed because people directly affected by these ideas eg. minorities will not even be in the audience in the first place or if they are, they will feel attacked and triggered and not express their ideas freely.

c) Consider how frequent the message is

If you have continuous reaffirmations of the same message, it is easier to prove that it will be persuasive but also that it will get across in a nuanced way. There is a difference between seeing a march once a year and going to a class every day.

#### 4. Delta

a) Actively consider what alternative influences exist that could already exist that could be claimed to already influence your message- easy opp line is just to say “aha but this is symmetric cause xyz influence exists”, preemptively consider that and frame argument around it

b) Easy method: identify the difference between your message and others that exist, try to connect what is unique to your message. 2 flaws- a) still easy to find yet another message and still mitigate delta b) this limits your pool of arguments- in lots of debates, even if a message is not unique, you can prove a delta

c) Effective method: Prove why a different perception will be created in the counterfactual world  
Aim of proof: i) Unique changing of minds that wouldn’t have happened without the message  
ii) Without this message, why would these opinions not be changed

Eg. TH, as LGBT movement, would cancel Pride Parade

After antagonism analysis, what is the counterfactual?

Without Pride, what actually changes people’s minds? An effective way to do this would be to prove that if people aren’t exposed to people through Pride they will be exposed either through a relative who comes out or through a celebrity who comes out. What changes is I don’t see them just as someone who is LGBT but someone who I have a close connection to, I am now able to see them just as me. I often am preconditioned to like them as someone I have positive opinions for and I have a confirmation bias to think them being LGBT is good. If I am exposed to Pride, I am preconditioned to seeing Pride as negative and therefore that first encounter allows me to see these relatives/celebrities as negative.

#### 5. Proving the Impact

3 sub-burdens:

a) Motivation: Why do people care enough about the message enough to act upon it?

b) Plausible actions: What CAN people do and why are they LIKELY to do it? Be concrete and specific

c) What is the normative value?- Why is the impact good or bad?

## 6. Which burden is the most important?

What is contested in the debate? If I have reached a point that is non-contestable, I can chill.

Rule of Thumb 1- In debates that are explicitly and exclusively about messages, the most contested burden will often be the likely interpretation. Usually whether the message is GOOD or BAD.

Rule of Thumb 2- In debates that are NOT explicitly and exclusively about messages, the most contested burden will likely be the impact.

Rule of Thumb 3: while the extent to which it is true varies, the delta will always be contested. Common in backlash arguments, prove the delta (Why do people change their minds? Why do they become even more bigoted? Why do you confirm their bigotry?)

## 7. When do you use message arguments?

- a) Very obvious: art, media representation, symbols and ceremonies, propaganda
- b) The not so obvious but always true: arguments about backlash, legitimacy, representation of women and minorities. Consider messaging arguments in policy motions involving groups. What narrative does the policy entail?
- c) Case by case: elections and politics, gender and social justice, education, integration

Eg. THBT schools should teach children to teach authority.

Lots of teams run big impacts on kids, does this mean you do drugs/listen to teachers and parents (or) does it mean you will be a critical citizen.

This is actually a message debate.

Elections and politics, gender and social justice, education are usually propaganda debates. Are these debates about CHANGING MINDS? Eg. propaganda during elections and electability.

In integration debates, usually about how an integrated group is perceived. Eg. THW construct public housing in wealthy neighbourhoods. Gov- make wealthy residents see the struggles of poor and be empathetic, Opp- reinforces stereotypes of the poor because of lower real estate value. These are both message arguments.

- d) In most other cases, avoid message arguments. i) The impact of messages is less direct impacts—>less likely impact (ppl change mind—> do stuff) ii) Message arguments require a lot of analysis which means they are time consuming and more vulnerable to attacks.

## 8. Competing Message Arguments

- a) Obvious: prove your message to be more likely
- b) Use the burdens of proof as tools of rebuttal- identify missing links in opposing arguments and point them out, try to refute them. (However, be wary of mitigatory rebuttal that harms your case symmetrically)
- c) Be actively comparative in your analysis pre-emptively (considering what alternative messaging exists- see above)
- d) If the alternative message isn't mutually exclusive to your own, weigh against it.

Eg. THBT environment should target politicians as opposed to people.

Gov- should persuade politicians cause change higher

Opp- easier to lobby to people and get message across

These could both be true and are likely true at the same time. Weigh which of these is important. Weighing for people's impact is contingent on efficacy so we need to do that first.

### 9. Weighing Message Arguments (in debates with also other arguments)

Avoid it as much as possible- hard to weigh messages against concrete practicals.

Weighing:

- a) A message often impacts more people than the more direct impacts in the debate. Eg. in affirmative action, the message about women in general benefits them as a whole while those getting an actual job is a small number, can weigh the general population
- b) Why the harm caused by a message is harder to opt out of

Eg. THW legalise paid surrogacy

OG- autonomy over women, right to liberate from poverty

OO- no free choice, pressured into this choice

CO- women being perceived as baby machines (or) babies being perceived as having a price tag. The choice to not be influenced by a policy, even if limited, is bigger than the choice not to be impacted by the message. If I am a surrogate woman, I may have pressures on both sides but choice exists to some extent, I had some opt in to do the job. However, if I am influenced by a message, I did not choose this and had zero opt in to the situation

- c) The direct impact is often temporary while a message is contemporary- Policies usually have a big, time-constrained impact but the message has generational impacts. Eg. about reparations, the reparations will help one generation but the actual messaging such as backlash stays for many years.