

## CHAPTER 9

# Media Selection



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Once the themes and symbols for the PSYOP program have been chosen, the PSYOP commander must decide how to convey them to the target audience in the most effective way. This step is the media selection. Before picking a medium or media mix for the message, the commander must consider the advantages and disadvantages of each medium as well as the general criteria for media selection.

### Definitions and Descriptions

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The three most common categories of media are audiovisual, visual, and audio. In proper media selection, the PSYOP planner must ensure that his selection not only has the capability to disseminate the message but will also reach the target audience.

#### Audiovisual Media

Audiovisual media combine the impacts of sight and sound. Face-to-face communication is an audiovisual medium and so are television, movies with soundtrack, and slides with tapes.

**Face-to-Face Communication.** Face-to-face communication is the conveyance of a message by the sender in the sight or presence of the receiver. Communication may be by one individual to another or one speaker addressing a large group. These individuals are known as agents of action. As a medium for PSYOP, face-to-face communication includes rallies, rumor programs, group discussions, lectures, show-and-tell demonstrations, theater, speeches, and talks with individuals. Choosing the most appropriate face-to-face communication technique depends entirely upon the opportunities PSYOP personnel can discover and the amount of control they believe they will have in using messages in those situations.

Guerrilla theater, which may feature live actors or puppets, is a special type of face-to-face communication. In it, members of the audience can be influenced by agents of action who are part of the audience's own group. The message can be the

main thrust of the drama, or it can be subtly woven into the presentation. The live theater performance can be carried out in a range of settings. Props and sets may be elaborate or simple, depending on presentation requirements and time and materials available. Historically, live drama has been a teaching medium in many cultures.

Sometimes the PSYOP personnel must create a situation to use face-to-face communication, for example, organizing a rally. Since groups are usually drawn together by a common interest, messages can be directed at different socioeconomic levels sharing that common interest. Consider whether there is already a type of social activity, such as a dance, banquet, or movie at a time when you need to influence the target audience. Fiestas, festivals, and religious activities bring people together, giving PSYOP personnel an excellent opportunity to appeal to them. Small and tightly organized groups can be appealed to very specifically. A highly desirable small group would be composed of the key communicators within a local community.

**Television.** Television, flexible and immediate, can be broadcast live and present events such as news, sports, and entertainment or use prerecorded programs on videotape. The advent of the videocassette recorder and home video camera have made it possible to create and show a presentation on television without using outside production facilities.

**Motion Pictures.** Motion pictures take the form of feature films, documentaries, cartoons, and newsreels. They can include special effects such as slow motion and time lapse.

**Slides.** Slides are photographic transparencies on a small plate or film used for projection. They can be used when face-to-face comments are needed during the showing.

### **Visual Media**

Visual media include all items effective only by being seen. Newspapers and magazines are visual and so are leaflets, posters, pamphlets, books, and graffiti. Visual media also include such art as drawing, painting, and sculpture.

### **Audio Media**

Audio media depend on sound alone for their effectiveness. Audio media are useful for brief, simple messages, and they gain effectiveness through the personal qualities of the human voice. They require little or no effort on the part of the audience. Audio messages overcome the barrier of illiteracy more easily than most visual methods. The key to the success of audio media is repetition. The common audio media used in PSYOP are radio and loudspeakers.

**Radio.** Radio can broadcast prerecorded and live drama, news programs, sporting events, and music. Even if the target audience does not have radio receivers in their homes, radio messages may still be used. For example, villagers without radios in remote areas in Vietnam were influenced by messages from radios floated down river to reach them.

**Loudspeakers.** Loudspeakers are a limited extension of face-to-face communication. Loudspeakers can convey speeches, music, and sound effects to the audience. They can also use records, tapes, and compact disks to augment or replace live performers. Messages can be rehearsed and prerecorded. Loudspeakers can be placed on the ground or mounted on trucks or aircraft. Generally, messages must be short. A long message cannot be conveyed by moving loudspeakers. Even a speaker on the ground can be silenced by enemy fire after only a short broadcast time. A speaker can use loudspeakers to communicate with assembled groups. He can direct loudspeaker broadcasts at opponent forces who have been cut off, urging them to surrender or to cease resistance. The speaker can use loudspeakers to issue instructions to persons in towns and fortified locations holding up the advance of friendly forces. He can also use loudspeakers effectively during limited visibility for deception operations by broadcasting sounds of vehicles or other equipment.

## Advantages and Disadvantages

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The commander must consider specific advantages and disadvantages of each medium before making a selection. Some of these advantages and disadvantages are discussed in the paragraphs below.

### Audiovisual Media

When selecting a form of audiovisual media, the PSYOP planner must weigh all factors prior to making a decision. In some cases, more than one type of media may be desired to ensure full dissemination of the message. In addition, product dissemination depends not only on the type of media selected but also on the availability of that media to provide coverage and the accessibility of the target audience.

**Face-to-Face Communication.** In general, face-to-face communication is the most effective medium. The communicator should never underestimate the effect a powerful speaker can have on a crowd (for example, Adolf Hitler, Martin Luther King, and Winston Churchill). Each of these key communicator had an enormously significant impact on his audience.

One advantage of face-to-face communication is that the speaker and the audience can evaluate each other immediately through body language and vocal cues as well as the words of the message. The speaker can adjust his message accordingly. Another advantage of face-to-face communication is that the speaker can convey complex information by repeating and amplifying ideas. Other advantages include—

- Detailed audience selection.
- Use in isolated areas not reached by mass media.
- Added credibility through source recognition.
- Speed in disseminating the PSYOP message.

One major disadvantage of face-to-face communication is the decentralized control, that is, each communicator must control his own situation. Another

disadvantage is the possibility that the speaker's actions and spoken words may be misunderstood. Also, the PSYOP communicator must often rely on indigenous personnel for translating the message and knowledge of local customs. Other disadvantages of face-to-face communication include its—

- Ineffectiveness in most conventional operations.
- Limited geographical area reached.
- Skilled personnel requirements.
- The time needed to develop rapport with the target audience.
- The chance of personal harm to the communicator.

**Television.** Television is highly effective for persuading. It can elicit a high degree of recall. Credibility is further increased when the communicator is known and respected by the target audience. Television can also reach a vast audience. It gives each viewer a sense of participating in a distant event without ever leaving home. Television programs can be edited and segments added or deleted to appeal to the special needs of the audience. Music in the background can contribute to the emotional impact of the message.

Another advantage of television is the opportunity to use videocassettes. Videocassettes can be studied in private or in small groups and can be kept secret. They are a powerful means of influencing people directly and indirectly. The direct influence is, of course, in the main theme. An indirect influence can also take place. For example, a secure life-style being demonstrated by a VCR recording may have a significant effect on an insecure target audience.

A disadvantage of television is that in many parts of the world television sets are rare or unevenly distributed; however, a broad audience can be reached by television receivers set up in public places. Most television receivers require an outside source of electrical power, which is not always available in some parts of the world. Unlike radio, television waves do not travel far. Rough terrain, atmospheric elements, and geography affect the range and strength of a television signal. Television signals may be boosted by relay stations, airborne transmitters, or relay satellites to reach long ranges. However, people outside the broadcasting range may still be influenced by messages on videocassettes.

A television station, even when operating on a limited schedule, creates a tremendous demand for program material. Each day's operation requires a large amount of film, videotape, and live programming to sustain a program schedule. Developing a new program requires even more time and specialized personnel. Another disadvantage of television is that its equipment and parts are delicate and extremely vulnerable to accidental or deliberate damage. Television stations can be easily identified and targeted by an enemy. At the receiving level, television sets are difficult to hide, particularly if an antenna is required.

**Motion Pictures and Slides.** Motion pictures have the advantage of bypassing audience illiteracy. Movies also have an inherent quality of drama and the ability to elicit a high degree of recall. They may include cartoons or special effects. They may gain added credibility by including news events and local settings familiar to

the target audience. A producer may rehearse scenes before filming and make the final performance seem highly realistic. In many cultures, the actor in a movie is considered to be like the part he has played. An actor can be useful because of the credibility he has gained. Movies may present a larger-than-life situation, which has great popular appeal. Background music can add to the emotional impact. The theater presentation can create group cohesiveness and can be enhanced by discussions with the audience afterward. Many people accept as factual the information presented in films.

Disadvantages of motion pictures include time necessary to produce them, possible restrictions placed on local populations to prohibit viewing, and susceptibility of film to damage from temperature changes and moisture. Another disadvantage of movies is that they may be outdated by clothing, vehicles, or equipment shown. In urban areas, motion pictures have a more limited audience than television because they are presented in theaters.

Slides have the advantages of economy, ease of use, and the opportunity for face-to-face comments during the showing. The drawback is the relative lack of interest in pictures that have no motion.

### **Visual Media**

Visual media are good for transmitting complex and lengthy material. Generally, the printed word has greater credibility than the spoken word. Printed material can be kept and reread for reinforcement; however, the opponent might punish anyone possessing it. Newspapers and leaflets require the audience's willingness and ability to read and study the material. The material must also be physically delivered to the audience. Opponent action, inclement weather, or lack of delivery support could prevent delivery. Posters can be eye-catching but, like other forms of printed material, can easily be destroyed or overprinted by the opponent. Books have the potential for a great influence on small intellectual groups, but they are expensive to produce. In addition, facilities for the production of visual media may be limited and require long lead times for production and dissemination. Appendix F provides some guidelines on field-expedient printing techniques, and Appendix G provides guidelines on time considerations for leaflet production and dissemination.

### **Audio Media**

Audio media have the advantage of both long range (radio) and mobility (loudspeaker). Since the message depends solely on the spoken word, PSYOP personnel must ensure the message is easily understood and the actions they desire are evident to the listener.

**Radio.** Radio can transmit information over great distances quickly, even while an event is happening. Improvements in transmission capabilities have increased the ability of PSYOP units to capitalize on the effect of radio. (See Appendix H.) However, the opponent and the weather can still interfere with transmission. Small transistor radios can be air-dropped into the target area, or an ally may provide a public listening place. Radio can influence listeners through the voice quality of the announcer as well as through the words themselves.

**Loudspeakers.** Loudspeakers are particularly appropriate for tactical operations because they can deliver messages on the spot in fast-moving situations.

Loudspeaker can be used as a PSYOP weapon to exploit targets of opportunity. The mobility of the loudspeaker allows PSYOP personnel to move to wherever a target audience may be found. For greater mobility, loudspeakers can be mounted on wheeled or armored vehicles or in aircraft. They can also be backpacked for access to areas inaccessible to vehicles. Loudspeakers enable the operator to pinpoint his target to a greater degree than most other media; therefore, he can personalize the message.

Loudspeaker operations are limited by broadcast range, vulnerability to small arms fire, and terrain- and weather-induced acoustical effects. Another disadvantage of loudspeaker operations is that they may be perceived as obvious PSYOP. Appendix I provides more information on the use of loudspeaker.

## Other Criteria in Media Selection

The PSYOP commander must always keep in mind certain general criteria for media. To select the most effective media mix, the commander may use the media selection matrix. (See Figure 9-1.) The selection criteria questions cover five main factors the commander must consider.

Check boxes that apply.

Criteria	Audiovisual				Visual					Audio		
	Face-to-Face	Television	Motion Pictures	Slides	Leaflets/Pamphlets	Newspapers	Posters	Magazines	Books	Graffiti/Art	Radio	Loudspeakers
1. Can the target audience receive the medium?												
2. Is the medium appropriate for the target audience?												
3. Is the medium available to the PSYOP unit?												
4. Does the medium meet time requirements?												
5. Is the medium appropriate for the stage of the operational continuum involved?												

**Figure 9-1. Media selection matrix.**

## Reception

*Can the target audience receive the medium?* By studying intelligence information about the target audience, the commander can determine whether geography, opponent countermeasures, weather, facilities, or the political situation will eliminate or limit the use of a certain medium. For example, the target audience may be located in a mountainous region with faulty television and radio reception. Strong winds may blow air-dropped leaflets into the wrong area. The opponent may be able to jam radio and television broadcasts or prevent leaflet drops with its air defenses. The target audience may not have television or radio receivers, or its system may be incompatible with U.S. equipment. If target audiences are punished by the government for possession of leaflets, the use of that medium may be unwise.

## Appropriateness

*Is the medium appropriate for the target audience?* The two main elements in this factor are relevance and credibility. Leaflets and newspapers are not relevant to an illiterate target audience. These people would rely on radio or television for their information. On the other hand, an elite group of intellectuals (who may be agents of action) may put more credibility in what they read rather than in what they see on television. Credibility is gained through consideration of the audience's culture. For example, if the target audience thinks of the United States as the Great Satan, then using messages that include materialism and sex would be ill-advised.

## Availability

*Is the medium available to the PSYOP unit?* This question covers the availability of personnel as well as equipment. For a radio broadcast, the unit needs language-qualified individuals with good speaking voices and access to radio transmission equipment.

## Timeliness

*Does the medium meet time requirements?* The unit may be unable to produce leaflets (See Appendix G) and other printed material quickly enough for a fast-moving situation but may have time to use live loudspeaker, radio, or television broadcasts instead. The preparation of contingency materials—such as prerecorded tapes and safe conduct passes printed ahead of time—gives the commander a greater range of options when time is limited.

## Stage of Operational Continuum

*Is the medium appropriate for the stage of the operational continuum involved?* Because of the proximity of the target audience, tactical PSYOP may be limited to face-to-face communication, loudspeakers, leaflets, posters, motion pictures, tapes, slide shows, and performances. Strategic PSYOP may use speeches, radio, television, books, magazines, and newspapers because of the broader applicability of the message.

The objectives of messages vary in strategic, operational, and tactical situations. For example, radio programs might be the best medium in a strategic situation in

which the objective is to diminish the will of a large group to resist. Such programs could also sustain or destroy morale, depending on the target, and could direct acts of dissidents in opposing territory. Such broadcasts could prepare a large target audience for postwar policies. Operational objectives for radio broadcasts would involve relatively small groups that could be encouraged to surrender or perform some other immediate action. The main objective in radio broadcasts on the tactical level is to urge cooperation of a group in a nearby area and therefore support immediate military operations.

Television is particularly effective in foreign internal defense (FID) and strategic operations because of its potential for influencing large numbers of people. That potential offsets the cost and difficulties of television production and transmission. In conventional war, face-to-face communication is largely limited to rumor. In military operations short of war, rumor may still be used for divisive purposes in counterinsurgency and unconventional warfare (UW) operations, but other techniques of face-to-face communication should be used to develop cohesive behavior. Themes can be planned ahead of time, while the actual phraseology may be spontaneous.

Generally, the commander of a PSYOP unit may use his own judgment for taking advantage of the immediate situation. Some media will be selected by higher authority, though. In Grenada, the PSYOP team knew ahead of time that they were to use the radio as one of their media, and they had leaflets and safe-conduct passes already printed.

## Purpose and Use of Media Mix

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Looking at the completed media selection matrix, the commander may see that more than one medium can be used effectively. The purpose of selecting a media mix is to increase the impact of the message. Two main guidelines for using media mix are reinforcement and avoidance of oversaturation.

To the maximum extent possible, all media selected should reinforce each other. Radio dissemination can augment leaflet distribution by repeating the same theme or by commenting on the leaflets. Newspaper circulation can be reinforced with rumors. Newspapers can also announce speeches or reprint them. Loudspeaker broadcasts can complement tactical leaflet drops by explaining how to use the safe-conduct passes. Puppet shows can supplement rumor by repeating the message as part of the show. The visual deception of showing tire tracks to suggest masses of vehicles that do not actually exist might require sounds of vehicles and perhaps the smell of oil and gasoline. When movies are used, an excellent opportunity exists to combine them with face-to-face communication such as live talks and announcements. The limitation of media mix is the danger of oversaturation. Too many loudspeaker broadcasts or leaflet drops may influence the target audience the wrong way. They may become bored by the message, or worse, they may become annoyed to the point they react against it.



## Special Media

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A special word needs to be added on the concept of merchandising. Merchandising is the use of gifts as a means of conveying a message. The PSYOP commander might be in a situation in which he should compose his own medium. The best way of disseminating a message might be to print it on a matchbox, a toy, a novelty, or a trinket. A soccer ball marked "Gift of the United States" and given to a schoolboy might get the message of American friendship across more effectively than any conventional medium. Merchandising involving food is extremely effective. Letting a hungry person know he is being given food from an American is direct evidence of American friendship. The food can be identified through posters at the food site or by signs on the food cartons. A message could be easily printed on utensils. In merchandising, the main guidelines are a knowledge of the target audience's culture and one's own imagination. The main limitations are the costs involved and the difficulty of associating the message with the items.

## Summary

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To select the most effective medium, the commander must be aware of the advantages and disadvantages of each medium. He must also consider certain general criteria, which can be summarized in these questions: Can the target audience receive the medium? Is the medium appropriate for the target audience? Is the medium available to the PSYOP unit? Does the medium meet time requirements? Is the medium appropriate for the level and method of warfare involved? More than one medium in a media mix can reinforce the PSYOP message in a different way.

Many of the guidelines for selection of media are not absolute. The PSYOP personnel must often rely upon their imagination and resourcefulness. Selection of media is a challenge. They should look for opportunities, choose a conventional medium, or invent an unconventional one. Each medium may have the capability in some situation to contribute to the overall success of the mission.