



WAS WORLD WAR ONE PROPAGANDA THE BIRTH OF SPIN?

Video 2 transcript

Presented by Neil Oliver, Archaeologist and Writer

(Neil Oliver, to camera)

With mounting fears of a national crisis in World War One, the government adopted clever techniques to persuade the public to think or act in the way it wanted.

Today, we might call this 'spin'.

But do we still see similar principles being used in other types of government campaigns today?

I'm here to meet the team behind the government's recent anti-smoking campaigns to find out more.

(Neil speaks to Gavin Bell, Managing Partner, Dare)

NEIL: When you look at the, see this wartime 100-year old campaign and the techniques involved, do you see similarities with how they sought to get the message across and the tricks they were pulling with what you do now?

GAVIN: Yes absolutely, the 'U boat' sinking, a Red Cross hospital ship, you know that's a similar technique to using here, we're creating a deep visceral response to something disgusting. It's all about bypassing that rational part of their brain and bypassing that cognition to hit them more emotionally and viscerally, I guess, here you've got that emotional connection. You can see, kids have always been a way to get to people's hearts, specifically with this image, you know. It's even down to the eyes, the fact she actually looks straight at you.

NEIL: It's not that your country that needs you, it's your children.

GAVIN: Yeah, absolutely.

NEIL: Quite a bit of the emphasis in the wartime campaign was the idea that if we all got together we could win.

GAVIN: Yeah.

NEIL: Does the shoulder-to-shoulder approach have any impact on a campaign like 'Smoke-free'.

GAVIN: Yeah, it really does, so one of the things that exists within behavioural economics / behavioural sciences is called the 'herd effect'.

NEIL: The 'herd'?

GAVIN: The 'herd effect', so everybody is doing it together makes something easier, so same in wartime to now, we use that same technique.

NEIL: During World War One, they set about having people speaking to the public, mobile cinemas taking the message into remote areas and events – is that still important?

GAVIN: Absolutely, I think what you have with 'Stoptober' and with the campaign that existed back in World War One was the need to create a social movement and making it real to you in your community to get that feeling, do you know what, that this is part of the national calendar and everybody needs to get involved.

NEIL: This one with the rugby player, I noticed there's, well, there's a statistical bit of information and that seems very modern to me.

GAVIN: Yeah, it's interesting because actually in today's world we would call that behavioural economics or behavioural science, which is using a numbers like this to get a sense that there's a momentum happening, or there's all these people getting involved, so last year 'Stoptober' we had 160,000 people make it to the 28 days – that's been really crucial to us in our messaging this year to say to people that all these people have done it, they've made it and you can do it too.

(Neil Oliver, to camera)

To me it's quite convincing that some of the same tactics that were used to influence the public during World War One were employed again for an anti-smoking campaign by the government today. It's eye-opening that we're still being affected by strategies developed 100 years ago and born out of completely different times.

IMAGES COURTESY OF PUBLIC HEALTH ENGLAND FOR 'SMOKE-FREE' IMAGES, MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY AND GETTY IMAGES.