

APPLICATION OF MEMETICS

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"...unless we're all part of the same dream. Only I do hope it's my dream, and not the Red King's! I don't like belonging to another person's dream..."--The character of Alice in Lewis Carroll's "Through the Looking Glass"

Face it, reality is a consensual hallucination. The only reason why you know something is the color 'red' is because somebody else told you so. And how did they know? Because someone told them. To make reality even more complex, you really don't have any true perception of reality, you only perceive your perceptions. If you haven't had to stop reading and think about this for at least five minutes (and how do you know how long a minute is?), then you just don't get the point. What is the point? That your knowledge, behavior, and all those other fuzzy concepts are learned from what other people tell you and from mimicking role models. No matter how original you think you may be, no matter how much life experience you have collected on your own, it all still rests on the foundations that you borrowed, willy nilly, from others. Now for a little secret--the part of your brain that does this, without much help from you I might add, and even when you don't want it to happen, is still at it, is still borrowing whole hog from the world around you. How else would you stay current in language, dress, social customs, and all that jazz? Here's another secret (notice how you perk up when you think you are going to be let in on a secret?); there are people out there who understand how it works a little better than you do (does that make you nervous?), and actually do something about it. Don't you think it's time you caught up with the rest of us (isn't it reassuring to be part of a group?) and found out how to do it too?

Welcome to the wonderful world of memetic engineering, the applied science of making friends think what you want them to think, and influencing enemies. Some might apply such a set of techniques to the commercial use of selling things, while others will see deeper and think of how to influence public opinion. This document is intended for that deeper thinker (and you do like to think of yourself as one of those, don't you?), and outlines the basic mechanisms for treating other peoples' minds as if they were your playground, and their own private Idaho.

Rule 1: Fix your target and the communication channel that reaches them. Knowing whom you want targeted is not as easy as it sounds. Given that you have clearly framed what your objective is, you have to decide on an approach--do you want many 'believers' quickly but only for a short term, or do you need a fewer number but for a longer term? What action or reaction is desired from these people? Can it realistically be met in the short or medium term? Or does it require a long term 'paradigm shift' to accomplish? Why will they do this? Can you make them think that they have a good motive? Once you have all this figured out, you can sketch up a rough character profile and research exactly how such individuals get their 'input.' After all, if you control a person's surroundings or input, you essentially control the person.

Rule 2: Pretest possible reactions. This is the fine tuning stage. Locate a potential target and take a test run to see what really happens when you start pushing their buttons. Take the feedback to heart and do any reengineering of the target, message, and channel you need to. Pretest again. Keep this up until you have it right.

Rule 3: Be flexible, and run the operation in place. It helps to be 'in country' when doing this sort of thing. If you fit, even partially, the profile for the target, and you are immersed in the same 'signal saturation' they are, you have a better probability of creating an effective meme. You also have the chance to make changes or course corrections on the fly if you have to. Call this 'sticking with what you know.'

Rule 4: Know your context. Know as much as possible about the general culture and subculture you targeting. You have to have everything down--vocabulary, syntax, timing, triggers, etc. to do this right. Be a cultural anthropologist. Look at those around you as if you were from Mars, not them. Question your assumptions.

Rule 5: Carefully pick the tone your message will take. You can pitch your message in a variety of ways: positive, prophylactic, and negative. Positive memes are ego building messages for the recipient. Prophylactic memes simply prevent spread or infection by others. Negative memes are the easiest to craft and have accepted, since they exploit mistakes and faults that are either really there or at least perceived as being there. For example, take Israeli efforts to influence public opinion in the U.S.; they have not so much successfully implemented such an effort, as much as they are one of the few voices out there. They have managed to promote a continual media bombardment of the Arabs as the 'bad guy' in print and film, potent places for such a message. The prophylactic side-effects are potent as well--talk of Israeli propoganda at all can get you labeled as being anti-Semitic, and talk of Israeli media influence gets you branded as paranoid; either way, you don't get listened to. The Israelis have also managed to build a considerable myth around themselves as 'underdog' (when they have the most advanced force in the region), as having an unbeatable military (when they are only well trained and far from infallible), and as having a potent intelligence capability (when MOSSAD has made some of the biggest blunders in the business). It all boils down to acting like the Wizard of Oz--acting powerful, mysterious, all-knowing, beyond judgment or reproach, when all you really are is a small, ordinary man hiding behind a threadbare curtain.

Rule 6: Decide on the duration and degree of repetition of your message. Pavlov had some things wrong, but he also had some things right, such as "Re-enforce often!" It also helps to have a good amount of variation with the reinforcement, so that the message doesn't get ignored (if you hear the same thing too many times in just the same way, you learn to tune it out).

Rule 7: Use existing channels to move your message. Don't get fancy, and don't try to move a meme across a newly established channel. Be careful with the new medium of the Internet (or Usenet)--people there are paranoid, scared, and skeptical in general, but that can be turned to your advantage if you understand that. Also, the Net acts as a 'community memory'--check out the beast known as the FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) which are kept current and accurate by an informal collective that knows the topic (two good examples are the cryptography FAQ and the exercise FAQs). Careful with your facts, and be subtle with your spin.

Rule 8: Carefully construct your content. A meme must be based on a solid intellectual, emotional, and economic model of the target population. It should aim at personalities, not issues. The 'mimicry' mechanism in people is susceptible because we are used to adopting patterns from other people. Issues just hit the intellectual gestalt and get processed, thus they have lower contagion; the only way issues can make it is if they imply a changed self image of the target subject, or are linked to an image of a person that the target can imagine themselves as.

Rule 9: Do not create new issues, but exploit existing ones. It is easier to hijack an already 'in progress' meme and apply some spin control, reinterpretation, shift in perception, and a colorful dash of revisionism.

Rule 10: Aggregate your approach. Build toward your true purpose over time; start memes out as being totally reliable to establish trust in the source. This 'collateral confirmation' gives credibility, and allows you to progress the future memes to approximate the target mindset. Be certain that the paradigm created by the meme fits into the existing climate, mindset, and general opinion, otherwise it has a low potential to spread and infect.

Rule 11: Don't make it seem like an attempt to influence them. The hard sell turns people off; back off and let them come to you. You catch more people through letting them into the group reluctantly than you do by having 'press gangs' roving the countryside. People dislike the power trip of having to do things.

Rule 12: Keep it simple and emotional. Frame the message to take advantage of releasers and gestalts; evoke emotions, since emotions are less susceptible to analysis, particularly in Western cultures.

Rule 13: Don't interfere (and benefit if possible) with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. These are the basics: physical fulfillment, food, warmth, sleep, safety. They are also not so basic: positive self-image, esteem in the eyes of their peers, love, belonging, respect.

Rule 14: Evoke a group identification. Pushing the buttons of your target's innate superiority, the shared suffering they have with the group, how they are the 'chosen' people goes a long way to reducing the maintenance necessary to keep members 'enrolled.'

Propaganda and Memetics

How do these two concepts differ? Propaganda creates a mindset that will accept or be neutral towards actions undertaken by the generating source. Memetics creates an active mindset that encourages participation (action, reaction, proselytizing) and perpetuation of the intent of the generating source. It depends on whether you want people to be sedate or pro-active.

Conclusions

There are a number of people selling things, and I don't just mean those info-mercials. Some people are selling religions, others are selling pop psychotherapy, politicians sell

themselves, sometimes literally. Some concepts could benefit from the tactics, similar to memetic tactics, that are used in those obnoxious info-mercials; maybe it is the removal from the abstract to the concrete that makes it so much more effective. No longer will you hear "It is better for the environment," "a united Ireland," or "democracy is good for you," but there will be a well-crafted meme showing you a person, someone you can identify with, someone you wouldn't mind being, enjoying the benefits of what before seemed like empty slogans. It certainly beats using the techniques to make people want 'buns of steel.'