

# [Relevance of the propaganda model in contemporary society](https://assignbuster.com/relevance-of-the-propaganda-model-in-contemporary-society/)

“ The Propaganda model is more relevant today than when first published”

Media is considered an integral part of daily life as we are constantly subject to being an audience to different forms of media platforms. Through market forces the media system is economically structured in such a way that it producessystemic biases, causing journalist and reporters to internalize presuppositions about the world producing ideological conformity without the need of coercion. The propaganda model attempts to explain the relationship between the so called ‘ free press’ and the media elites. This essay contends to unravel the relevance of the five filters of the propaganda model and how applicable this theory it in contemporary society as opposed to when it was first introduced.

Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky’s 1988 book titled ‘ Manufacturing Consent’ claimed that media behavior is driven by a variety of variables that extend from both institutional and political pressures in a profit-driven system. As a direct contrast to the liberal standpoint that suggests journalism is incompatible and adversarial to the influence of elitism and established power. Thepropaganda theoryintroduced in 1988 maintains that media content will undeniably “ serves the ends of the dominant elite ” (Herman & Chomsky 1994, 1). As one of the most notable books of its time, ‘ Manufacturing Consent’ contested the widespread belief of the impartial nature of the media. To remove the degree of democracy, the official structure of the propaganda theory stems from the agenda setting of corporate power selling audiences to different established power. When the theory was first introduced, it was considered ludicrous to imply large media institutions including CBS news, The New York Times and Time were vessels of propaganda that “ depend heavily on elite information sources ” (Herman, 2003, 114). In today’s modern society mistrust, disinformation and propaganda pervades the media, where there is a strong emphasis on denouncing the myth of democratic western media.

The propagandamodel when it was first introduced recognized patterns of media dependencesupplied by official sources, for instance media reliance on military orgovernment officials. Media circulated around fortifying a degree of publicsupport particularly in cases of war, for example the 2003 media frenzysurrounding the false speculation of destructive arsenal in Iraq was allpolitically motivated to support the rise of the freedom agenda after the 9/11attack on America or the US invasion of Iraq. Through the use of the fiveselective filters in the propaganda model: corporate ownership, the role ofadvertising, the media elite, flak by established power and anti-communism as aform of ideological control, it becomes clear that the role of the UnitedStates media in the 19 th century was more pertinent to theimplementation of the filters as opposed to today. The five filters featured inthe opening chapter of ‘ Manufacturing Consent’ play a crucial role in demonstratingthe corruptive nature of the so called ‘ democratic’ media system. The notablecensorship and enforcement of selective agenda setting and framing enabledestablished power to control mass media outlets. The Model demonstrated howradical, critical journalism or any ‘ offensive’ media contribution can bescreened out selectively, particularly those that do not align with theinterests of the corporate power. This selective process is demonstratedthrough Herman and Chomsky’s five filters of propaganda.

## Corporateownership

The size andconcentration of media ownership to elite groups of individuals with commoninterests allows for substantial amounts of media control. Mass media firmsoften linked with bigger conglomerates with the ultimate end game as profitmaximization and high social status. By limiting the control of media outlets, negative press would be filtered to ensure corporate interests. Corporate mediafirms also share a common interest with other sectors of the economy, they havea stake in maintaining an economic and political climate that Is valuable tothere profitability. Concentration of media ownership does present a filter forwhat news will be selected for broadcasting, as quoted by Rupert Murdoch, president and CEO of news corporation “ whenyou are the monopoly supplier you are inclined to dictate” (Mail&Guardian, 10 th Jan 1997) depicts how policies and personnel at thetime reflect the owner’s conservative politics.

### Today’srelevance

The introductionof new technologies has introduced new platforms of media distribution andpackaging. Newspapers were the single, most dominated source of mediacommunication during the 19 th century and no longer are they run bya single news corporation or media company. The 21st century through the advancement of technological innovation andcommunication has observed an era of cross media ownership of broadcast, printand e-media.

## Advertising

The power of advertising over forms of media, particularly radio and television acts as a primarysource of income.  Advertisers do notintervene directly but demand a supportive editorial and programmingenvironment. Media relies on advertising for the bulk of their revenuetherefore it is against the interests of the news media to produce content thatwould antagonize advertisers. Chris Elliot, the Guardian editor claimed thathistorically “ 60% of newspapers’ revenuecame from advertising… but during the 1990’s … revenue crept up to 70% of thenewspapers income ” (Ceasefire, 2011). Media content is not the main focusbut rather a method of attracting viewers to the advertisements which isprogramming’s main goal.

### Today’srelevance:

As a consequence, to the cultivation of different media platforms there is more room foradvertising which increases the costs of producing a broadcast production, newspaper or website. Even media accessed for free is inundated with advertsand web banners, all testament to advertising as a source of income tomainstream media. However, today certain media platforms eliminate theharassment of advertisements or the option of ad-blockers is widely adopted forthose who demand continuous media consumption.

## The media elite

The notion ofcorporate censorship stems from the desire to curb and confine publicbroadcasting. Media elites possess established ‘ think tanks’ that will providethe media with pro-corporate experts who meet conservative standards. Throughout the 1980’s the most quoted think thank was the Heritage Foundation, one of the most influential conservative right- winged voice. Theseconservative think tanks have the financial aid to influence the news gatheringprocess, they include government officials and politicians typically seen asimpartial and reliable sources. The majority of the American public opinion isevidently more liberal on economic issues then conservative ‘ experts’ whodominate the media on areas including government social policy and governmentspending priority. This closed system of media censorship, manipulatesindividuals to trust the expert opinion and complimentary co-independent sourceas observed in the 2003 Iraq War where official claims surrounding Iraq werepresented as an official source without investigation of their reliability.

### Today’srelevance:

It has becomeclear that the adoption of corporate and government approved sources have usedthe advantage of being recognized as credible sources through “ their status and prestige ” (Herman &Chomsky, 1998).  When the propagandamodel was first introduced “ the massmedia are drawn into a symbiotic relationship with powerful sources ofinformation by economic necessity and reciprocity of interest” (Herman& Chomsky, 1998). Yet the high demands of the news industry particularly inthe areas of public relations journalism ‘ churnalism’ can occur, where itbecomes more convenient to vaguely change the wording of a previous PRrelease’s in todays society.

## Flak:

When the media, journalists, whistle blowers, sources stray away from the consensus. When thestory us inconvenient for the powers begin to discredit sources, trashingsources and discrediting conversation. Flak acts as means of disciplining themedia and can take many forms including letters, emails, phone calls andprotests. In order to avoid the potential outcry from viewers and corporationsthe media tend to avoid watered down stories that have the potential to createflak.

### Today’srelevance

Through theintroduction of social media platform, its has become increasingly easier formembers of society to voice an opinion. Social media sites including Facebook, twitter, Instagram and review websites have contributed to a new phenomenon ofa global audience. Politian’s such as Hilary Clinton and Donald Trump haveadopted social media sites as a way of communicating to the mass audience, particularly during the 2016 presidential election. Now president Donald Trumpcontinues to use predominately twitter to address his stance on currentpolicies and current affairs to over 30 million followers. Consumers today, unlike any point in time have received the most amount of value and influenceover companies. Online social media has been revised to include selections thatenable the consumer to voice a complaint or provide feedback.

## Common Enemy:

To manufactureconsent, you need a common enemy. Communism, terrorism, immigrants all leads tofear which helps corral public opinion to abide by narrow range of agendasetting by elitist individuals and groups. Consent is being constantlymanufactured through the necessity of the media finding ways to marginalize andcontrol the public in a democratic society as ‘ they who have put out the peopleeyes reproach them of their blindness” (Milto, 1642).  The agenda setting in the national press, shape and control the information and sources that support a conservativestandpoint to embody an anti-communist ideology.

The propagandamodel’s ‘ free market’ depicts a closed system of selective screening topreserve the interests of the established power. Herman and Chomsky’s‘ Manufacturing Consent’ successfully explains the relevance of the five filtersto the United States mass media industry at the time the theory was introduced. During the 20 th century the upsurge of propaganda surrounding theimpact of WWI and WWII in part encompassed the political and cultural climate ofa highly indoctrinated society where elementary truths were easily manipulatedto sway public opinion. Towards the end of the industrial revolution, particularcommunication technology such as print, radio and television became efficientat mass producing and broadcasting for public consumption. The ideology of theindustrial revolution emanated through the ‘ manufacturing’ aspects of the massmedia. Similar to assembly lines in the car manufacturing process, a singlehierarchical structure would ensure that control of the broadcasting contentwould stem outwards from established elites who disseminate information. Thefive filters of the propaganda model to a substantial extent are not applicableto society today. A free press that speaks truthfully to the powerless is anecessary pre-condition for a democratic society. The means by whichinformation is disseminated to the voting public in a capitalist systempresents a fundamental barrier to popular democracy.

At the time thepropaganda theory was introduced the public mind was ultimately a commodity foreconomic elites to abuse. The prospect of political action by and for theworking class becomes marginalized even further when we consider howcompetition between groups of major investors drives the political system thatshape the mass media in a fundamentally positive light and remove theinvolvement of the public. The general population became subordinated to apolitical and economic elite. Today’s technological capacities continue toincrease every day; we have removed the experience of one mass audience collectinginformation from a single broadcasting network to a vast network with multipleinformation channels for different audiences. The emergence of new forms ofcommunication media undermines the propaganda model by increasing theavailability of previously excluded groups to broadcast their opinion. The newdynamics of media communication has obscured the conventional distinction of anaudience and a broadcaster. Through the introduction of collaborativelyproduced wikis and blogs audiences are able to source their own mediainformation and collaborate with other members of society in the absence ofelite control.

Criticisms of thepropaganda model have highlighted structural flaws in the model itself claimingthe methodology of the model is inconsistent as “ an almost conspiratorial view of the media” (Holsti & Rosenau, n. d, 174).  Despite the propaganda modelrevealing the structural limitations of the elite media system as being too “ mechanical and functionalist ” (Hallin, 1994, 121), it can be observed as too hostile towards elites facilitating thestatus quo.  The model is considerablyoutdated by the development of new information technology and as Lehrer asserts“ the model amounts to a Marxistconception of right-wing false consciousness” (Lehrer, 2004, 67-8). BothHerman and Chomsky have rejected the criticism of the propaganda model claimingthe critics charge against it “ wasdismissed with a few superficial clichés without fair presentation orsubjecting it to the test of evidence” (Herman, 2003, 114). Furthermore, they dismissed the notion of the propaganda model posing as too deterministicand stated that any criticism of the propaganda model for its functionalistqualities is completely dubious (Herman, 2003, 114).

In conclusion, whilst the model demonstrates how corporate elitists filter news content that is widely distributed with a set agenda challenging the notion of free press. The idea of democracy in todays society dominates the media as individuals have become more skeptical of news corporations and no longer adhere to a single source of information. Thus, the propaganda model to a substantial extent is not relevant to modern society.

## References

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