

Relevance of the propaganda model in contemporary society



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“ 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 produces systemic biases, causing journalists 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 is 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. The propaganda theory introduced 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

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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 19th 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.

Corporate ownership

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

Today's relevance

The introduction of new technologies has introduced new platforms of media distribution and packaging. Newspapers were the single, most dominated source of media communication during the 19th century and no longer are they run by a single news corporation or media company. The 21st century through the advancement of technological innovation and communication has observed an era of cross media ownership of broadcast, print and e-media.

Advertising

The power of advertising over forms of media, particularly radio and television acts as a primary source of income. Advertisers do not intervene directly but demand a supportive editorial and programming environment. Media relies on advertising for the bulk of their revenue therefore it is against the interests of the news media to produce content that would antagonize advertisers. Chris Elliot, the Guardian editor claimed that historically "60% of newspapers' revenue came from advertising... but during the 1990's ... revenue crept up to 70% of the newspapers income" (Ceasefire, 2011). Media content is not the main focus but rather a method of attracting viewers to the advertisements which is programming's main goal.

Today's relevance:

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

The media elite

The notion of corporate censorship stems from the desire to curb and confine public broadcasting. Media elites possess established 'think tanks' that will provide the media with pro-corporate experts who meet conservative standards. Throughout the 1980's the most quoted think tank was the <https://assignbuster.com/relevance-of-the-propaganda-model-in-contemporary-society/>

Heritage Foundation, one of the most influential conservative right-winged voice. These conservative think tanks have the financial aid to influence the news gathering process, they include government officials and politicians typically seen as impartial and reliable sources. The majority of the American public opinion is evidently more liberal on economic issues than conservative 'experts' who dominate the media on areas including government social policy and government spending priority. This closed system of media censorship, manipulates individuals to trust the expert opinion and complimentary co-independent sources as observed in the 2003 Iraq War where official claims surrounding Iraq were presented as an official source without investigation of their reliability.

Today's relevance:

It has become clear that the adoption of corporate and government approved sources have used the advantage of being recognized as credible sources through " *their status and prestige* " (Herman & Chomsky, 1998). When the propaganda model was first introduced " *the mass media are drawn into a symbiotic relationship with powerful sources of information by economic necessity and reciprocity of interest* " (Herman & Chomsky, 1998). Yet the high demands of the news industry particularly in the areas of public relations journalism 'churnalism' can occur, where it becomes more convenient to vaguely change the wording of a previous PR release's in today's society.

Flak:

When the media, journalists, whistle blowers, sources stray away from the consensus. When the story is inconvenient for the powers begin to discredit sources, trashing sources and discrediting conversation. Flak acts as means

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of disciplining the media and can take many forms including letters, emails, phone calls and protests. In order to avoid the potential outcry from viewers and corporations the media tend to avoid watered down stories that have the potential to create flak.

Today's relevance

Through the introduction of social media platforms, it has become increasingly easier for members of society to voice an opinion. Social media sites including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and review websites have contributed to a new phenomenon of a global audience. Politicians such as Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump have adopted social media sites as a way of communicating to the mass audience, particularly during the 2016 presidential election. Now President Donald Trump continues to use predominantly Twitter to address his stance on current policies and current affairs to over 30 million followers. Consumers today, unlike any point in time have received the most amount of value and influence over companies. Online social media has been revised to include selections that enable the consumer to voice a complaint or provide feedback.

Common Enemy:

To manufacture consent, you need a common enemy. Communism, terrorism, immigrants all lead to fear which helps corral public opinion to abide by a narrow range of agenda setting by elitist individuals and groups. Consent is being constantly manufactured through the necessity of the media finding ways to marginalize and control the public in a democratic society as 'they who have put out the people's eyes reproach them of their blindness' (Milton, 1642). The agenda setting in the national press, shape and control <https://assignbuster.com/relevance-of-the-propaganda-model-in-contemporary-society/>

the information and sources that support a conservative standpoint to embody an anti-communist ideology.

The propaganda model's 'free market' depicts a closed system of selective screening to preserve the interests of the established power. Herman and Chomsky's 'Manufacturing Consent' successfully explains the relevance of the five filters to the United States mass media industry at the time the theory was introduced. During the 20th century the upsurge of propaganda surrounding the impact of WWI and WWII in part encompassed the political and cultural climate of a highly indoctrinated society where elementary truths were easily manipulated to sway public opinion. Towards the end of the industrial revolution, particular communication technology such as print, radio and television became efficient at mass producing and broadcasting for public consumption. The ideology of the industrial revolution emanated through the 'manufacturing' aspects of the mass media. Similar to assembly lines in the car manufacturing process, a single hierarchical structure would ensure that control of the broadcasting content would stem outwards from established elites who disseminate information. The five filters of the propaganda model to a substantial extent are not applicable to society today. A free press that speaks truthfully to the powerless is a necessary precondition for a democratic society. The means by which information is disseminated to the voting public in a capitalist system presents a fundamental barrier to popular democracy.

At the time the propaganda theory was introduced the public mind was ultimately a commodity for economic elites to abuse. The prospect of political

action by and for the working class becomes marginalized even further when we consider how competition between groups of major investors drives the political system that shape the mass media in a fundamentally positive light and remove the involvement of the public. The general population became subordinated to a political and economic elite. Today's technological capacities continue to increase every day; we have removed the experience of one mass audience collecting information from a single broadcasting network to a vast network with multiple information channels for different audiences. The emergence of new forms of communication media undermines the propaganda model by increasing the availability of previously excluded groups to broadcast their opinion. The new dynamics of media communication has obscured the conventional distinction of an audience and a broadcaster. Through the introduction of collaboratively produced wikis and blogs audiences are able to source their own media information and collaborate with other members of society in the absence of elite control.

Criticisms of the propaganda model have highlighted structural flaws in the model itself claiming the methodology of the model is inconsistent as "*an almost conspiratorial view of the media*" (Holsti & Rosenau, n. d, 174).

Despite the propaganda model revealing 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 the status quo. The model is considerably outdated by the development of new information technology and as Lehrer asserts "*the model amounts to a Marxist conception of right-wing false consciousness*" (Lehrer, 2004, 67-8).

Both Herman and Chomsky have rejected the criticism of the propaganda

model claiming the critics charge against it “ *was dismissed with a few superficial clichés without fair presentation or subjecting it to the test of evidence*” (Herman, 2003, 114). Furthermore, they dismissed the notion of the propaganda model posing as too deterministic and stated that any criticism of the propaganda model for its functionalist qualities 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 today's 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.

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