

Chomsky, Noam and Herman, Edward S. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media.*

I. A Propaganda Model

a. Purpose of the Media

- i. “The mass media serve as a system for communicating messages and symbols to the general populace” (1).
- ii. “It is their function to amuse, entertain, and inform, and to inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs, and codes of behavior that will integrate them into the institution structures of the large society” (1).
- iii. Fulfilling this role in a world of concentrated wealth and conflict of interest requires propaganda.

b. Essential Ingredients for the Propaganda Model (or News “Filters”)

- i. The size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation
- ii. Advertising as the primary income source
- iii. Reliance upon information provided by government, business, and “experts” by primary sources and agents of power.
- iv. “Flak” as a means of disciplining the media
- v. Anticommunism as a national religion and control mechanism

c. Filter 1: Size, Ownership, and Profit Orientation of the Mass Media

i. Media entities in 1986

- a. 1,500 daily newspapers
- b. 11,000 magazines
- c. 9,000 radio and 1,500 TV stations
- d. 2,400 book publishers
- e. 7 media studios

ii. Monopoly

- a. 29 of the “largest media systems account for over half of the output of newspapers, and most of the sales and audiences in magazines, broadcasting, books, and movies” (4).

iii. Top Tier Defines Agenda

- a. The media is tiered and are measured by prestige, resources, and outreach.
- b. Top tier comprises between 10 – 24 systems.
- c. “It is the top tier, along with government and wires services, that defines the news agenda and supplies much of the national and international news to the lower tiers of the media, and thus for the general public” (5).

iv. Financial Data for 24 Large Media Corporations

- a. See chart 1-1 on page 6 – 7
- b. All but one have assets worth over \$1 billion
- c. The medium size is \$2.6 billion
- d. $\frac{3}{4}$ have after tax profits of over \$100 million

v. Consolidation

- a. Profitability in a deregulated market has led to an increase in takeovers and takeover threats.

vi. Control of Stock

- a. See table 1-2 on page 9 – 10.
- b. Approximately $\frac{2}{3}$ of the stocks are closely held or held by the members of the originating family.
- c. These controlling groups have a stake in upholding the status quo “by virtue of their wealth and strategic position” (8).

vii. Prime Objective, Diversification

- a. The prime objective, with the help of the pressure from investors, is profitability.
- b. Many companies have ventured into other media outlets that have growth potential.

viii. Dependence and Reliance on Government

- a. “The radio-TV companies and networks all require government licenses and franchises and are thus potentially subject to government control and harassment” (13).
- b. The media depends on the government for general support.
- c. All businesses are interested in (13):
 - 1. Business taxes
 - 2. Interest rates
 - 3. Labor policies
 - 4. Enforcement and nonenforcement of antitrust laws
- d. Example
 - 1. “GE and Westinghouse depend on the government to subsidize their nuclear power and military research and development, and to create a favorable climate for their overseas sales” (13).

d. Filter 2: The Advertising License to do Business

i. Revenues from Advertising

- a. Without the support of advertising, newspapers would cease to be economically viable.
- b. “Before advertising become prominent, the price of a newspaper had to cover the costs of doing business” (14).
- c. “With the growth of advertising, papers that attracted ads could afford a copy price well below production costs” (14).
- d. Subsidy from advertising gives ad-based media a price-marketing-quality edge over non ad-based media.
- e. Attracting the affluent audience
 - 1. “[...]the mass media are interested in attracting audiences with buying power, not audiences per se...” (16).

ii. Political Discrimination

- a. “Working-class and radical media...suffer from discrimination of advertisers” (16).

iii. Selective Programming

- a. Advertisers selectively choose among programs that are in line with their own principles.
- b. “With rare exceptions these are culturally and politically conservative” (17).
- c. Deny sponsorship of critical programming
 - i. “Large corporate advertisers on television will rarely sponsor programs that engage in serious criticisms of corporate activities, such as the problem of environmental degradation, the workings of the military-industrial complex, or corporate support of and benefits from Third World tyrannies” (17).

e. Filter 3: Sourcing Mass-Media News

i. Reliable Sources of Information

- a. The media needs reliable and economically viable sources of information.
- b. Sources include:
 1. The White House
 2. Pentagon
 3. State Department
 4. Business corporations
 5. Trade groups
- c. Produce large volume of material
 - i. “These bureaucracies turn out a large volume of material that meets the demands of news organizations for reliable, scheduled flows” (19).
- d. Merit
 - i. These sources “also have the great merit of being recognizable and credible by their status and prestige” (19).
- e. U.S. Air Force public information outreach during 1979 – 1980: see page 20
 - 140 newspapers, 690,000 copies per week
 - Airman* magazine, monthly circulation 125,000
 - 34 radio and 17 TV stations, primarily overseas
 - 45,000 headquarters and unit news releases
 - 615,000 hometown news releases
 - 6,600 interviews with news media
 - 3,200 news conferences
 - 500 news media orientation flights
 - 50 meetings with editorial boards
 - 11,000 speeches
- f. “Only the corporate sector has the resources to produce public information and propaganda on the scale of the Pentagon and other government bodies” (21).
- g. Large bureaucracies subsidize the media
 1. Tax dollars → Bureaucracies → Media Subsidy
 2. In the case of the Pentagon and the State Department’s Office of Public Diplomacy... “the citizenry pays to be propagandized in the interest of powerful groups such as the military contractors and other sponsors of state terrorism” (23).

ii. Influence and Coercion from Sources

- a. The media will feel that need to mute criticisms of their sources.
- b. Sources can use their power and prestige as a lever to deny critics access.

f. Filter 4: Flack and the Enforcers

i. Flack

- a. Flak: “negative responses to a media statement or program”(26).
- b. If it is produced on a large scale, “it can be both uncomfortable and costly to the media” (27).
- c. Organizations producing flack (27 – 28):
 - American Legal Foundation
 - Capital Legal Foundation
 - Media Institute
 - Center for Media and Public Affairs
 - Accuracy in the Media
- d. Even though these organizations “steadily attack the media, the media treat them well” (28).
- e. Government as a major producer of flack
 - 1. “The government is a major producer of flack, regularly assailing, threatening and “correcting” the media, trying to contain any deviations from the established line” (28).

g. Filter 5: Anticommunism as a Control Mechanism

i. Communism as the Ultimate Evil

- a. “Communism as the ultimate evil has always been the specter haunting property owners, as it threatens the very root of their class position and superior status” (29).
- b. “This ideology helps mobilize the populace against an enemy, and because the concept is fuzzy it can be used against anybody advocating policies that threaten property interests or support with Communist states and radicalism” (29).
- c. Support of fascism is justified as a lesser evil.

ii. The New Ideology

- a. Democracy and the free market