

## A Critique of Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of Mass Media

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### Abstract

This review is a critique of a masterpiece "Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of Mass Media" written by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky. The paper entirely attempts to critique the paradigm of Propaganda Model (PM) applied as a framework to criticize the performance and structural behavior of U.S mainstream media system. The review relies entirely on the book. Greater emphasis is given to the framework of the book-Propaganda Model. Herman and Chomsky adapted it into Manufacturing Consent, as it suggests that 'consent' or shared understanding is cooked (manufactured) by elites "specialized classes" as the authors name them. The big media are controlled by few profit-seeking owners; therefore, they do not encourage free flow of news and analysis that are solely against the other end of their interest. Due to this reason, 'realities' are preferred to be fabricated and disseminated to the mass. For such solid justification, the authors developed the propaganda model to evaluate the performance of media in U.S. in exploring the main print and broadcast platforms, they used the model as a framework; and the writers of this review article sought the model from that perspective and exerted effort to critique arguments.

**Keywords:** Media; Propaganda model; Political economy; Ideology

### Introduction

#### A brief note manufacturing consent

The Propaganda Model has been introduced by Edward Herman and the well known American Linguist and Media Critique Noam Chomsky. This model is well explained and defended in Manufacturing Consent which is published in 1998, primarily intended to criticize the behavior of the mass media in the United States in general and the way the mainstream media structured and patterned to 'protect' elites business in particular. This model built itself on Critical-structural or Critical-Marxist tradition of economy and political ideology. As the title first used by Walter Lippmann in the first half of 20th c, Herman and Chomsky adapted it into Manufacturing Consent, it suggests that 'consent' or shared understanding is cooked (manufactured) by manufacturers "specialized classes" as the authors call them. The big media are controlled by few profit-seeking owners; therefore, they do not encourage free flow of news and analysis that are solely against the end of their interest. Due to this reason, 'realities' are preferred to be fabricated and disseminated to the mass. For such solid justification, the writers developed the propaganda model to evaluate the performance of media in U.S. in exploring the main print and broadcast platforms, they used the model as a framework, and the writer of this paper sought the model from that point of view and exerted an effort to critique and interpret critically to derive a new insight.

### Manufacturing Consent

#### The ideology behind the mainstream media

Mass media play an indispensable role in a democratic community. Media are supposed to perform as intermediary bridges that reflect public opinion as their primary purpose, respond to public concerns and make state officials alert to work for the interest of citizens.

The fundamental notion of the so-called democracy depends on reasonably informed community. But the mainstream media especially in the United States; are not playing their deserved role and failed to bring a desired result. Hence, following this failure the model tries to show the big relationship between the powerful corporate ideology and

the media. This means the ideological network of mainstream media and business forms diverted the aforementioned role of media into clits ideology. Herman and Chomsky firmly believe that the interlocking of mass media with corporate corrupts in disseminating information and mobilizing media audiences in support of the "Special interest groups" that dominate the state and private economy.

The relationship between the media and the political process is dialectical-one consumes the other. In brief, government remains as a main source of news (information) for reporters, and journalists (the media) are systematically used by government to mobilize the mass. Doris Graber in her article Beyond Myths and stereotypes, emphasized the role of US media as "The relationship between media and government is unusual in the united states because the framers of the constitution assumed that media in a democracy must be free from government control... checks and balances within the political system would be strengthened by in dependent external safeguards provided by news media eager to preserve the people's control over their government" [1].

But since its publication, the Propaganda Model has received very little attention within the field of media and communication studies due to its structural question of mainstream media than the effects. This "Watchdog" role of media shifted to 'market ideology'. This is why Chomsky and Herman expose the ideology behind ion the U.S. liberal democracy as, "... this is easily offset by the greater ideological force of the belief in the "miracle of the market (as Reagan articulates)

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**Received** September 19, 2016; **Accepted** September 22, 2016; **Published** September 26, 2016

**Citation:** Shemelis A (2016) A Critique of Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of Mass Media. J Archt Eng Tech 5: 176. doi: 10.4172/2168-9717.1000176

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the triumph of capitalism and the increasing power of those with an interest in privatization and market rule have strengthened the grip of market ideology, at least among the elite... (and) therefore journalism (in U.S.) has internalized this ideology." [2].

Regardless of this fact and scenario in that nation, Propaganda Model clearly represents the media performance.

## Critiquing the Book

### What is propaganda model?

PM is introduced by Herman and Chomsky to study the behavior of Media. As they call it "an analytical framework that attempts to explain the performance of U.S media in terms of the basic institutional structures and relationships within which they operate".

Andrew M. and Jeffery K. explain propaganda model as "firmly rooted in the critical-Marxist, more specifically the political economy, tradition of media and communication studies... in terms of its application... the PM is one of the most tested models within the social sciences. However it, has received very little attention within mainstream media..." (2010:215). On the other hand, Edward Herman himself describes the model as "The model that describes a system in which the media serve the elite ... and policies whereby the powerful protect their interests..." (2003, 1).

From the above explanations, we, therefore, can understand that propaganda model is the model argues that mainstream media operates as vital instrument of spreading and inculcating propaganda in the liberal democracies and suggests that elite interests have massive influence on the interests and choices of the mass media.

### Why propaganda model?

Because the propaganda model challenges and deconstructs basic foundations of elite "reality" profit maximization and manufacturing consent and suggests that the media serve corporate ends, it is commonly "marginalized" (Andrew Mullen) from media debate and academic environment. Herman the architect of the model clearly reasoned it as

"Propaganda model is noteworthy, for one reason, because that perspective is consistent with long standing and widely held elite views that "the masses are short-sighted" [3].

Meaning, its crucial interest in interpreting and explaining how the mainstream media are embedded on the market system and corrupt the major role in the society-mass media have grown up historically with a strong and widely shared image as having an important part to play in public life and being essentially within the public domain" [4].

Though, McQuail (2005) insist the role of media in such a way, in liberal nations like US; the model does suggest that the min stream media, as elite institution, commonly FRAME news and allow debate only within the parameters of elite perspectives, then the media serve these elite interests uncompromisingly.

The issue of Manufacturing Consent is to explain and analyze U.S mainstream media performance, not effect. The Propaganda Model also according to the writers and my view is an important framework to check the workings of the mainstream media. Particularly, the central argument or 'theme' of the work is to quest and call for reformation of an observable pattern of indignant campaigns and suppressions, of shading and emphasis, and of selection of context (means where to report events and omit for special purpose), premises, and general

AGENDA of Agenda setters, is highly functional for established power and respective for the needs of the US government and major power elites consensus.

Reagan's 'free market place' ideology and Bush's 'total spectrum dominance' policy of media [5] in the name of 'free press' and 'competition' media conglomeration, though it has advantages, becomes undemocratic. For example,

"In 1983 fifty firms dominated the whole mass media of the U.S. in 1990 the figure shrunk to 23, and by the year 1993 almost all media occupied by nine global organization (Bagdikian, quoted in Manufacturing Consent).

According to the very notion of PM, the writers attempt to provide REASONS and empirical justifications to support the model's claim.

### Free market ideology

The media embrace large conglomerates. News International, CBS, Time-Warner, General Motors are heavily involved in weapons production because owners are profit driven by free market ideology. Moreover, newspapers, radio and TV stations fail to criticize the 'free market notion' which is the big source of their money, but stick on big corporations and government foreign policies that may bring them more money again.

### Dichotomy of reporting

In Manufacturing Consent, media treatment of issues or events in reporting has got dichotomization of "WORTHY" and "UNWORTHY" victims where the authors employed the terms with a trace of irony as the varying treatment related to foreign policy advantages, economic benefits and political hegemony rather than journalistic "worth of news".

For instance, ideas or any event is accepted or propagated vis-à-vis the U.S. interest. All mainstream media accepted the hegemony that the Polish government's crackdown on the solidarity Union was highly newsworthy and granted big discouragement; where as the same crackdown in Turkey case was unworthy, the reason is here for being 'client' state and 'enemy state', in Poland is taken as weakening Soviet-communist and in Turkish government as "client" and no more brutality.

Another evidence and assumption of the book is the coverage of the media in Indochina wars. First the extraordinary dream of United States in the Communist countries of Asia, like Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos is to restore ideological supremacy-liberal philosophy. Therefore the media were also in behalf of this hallucination to expand free market economy-liberal economic system-through, the invasion of U.S. military of Vietnam was celebrated well the mainstream like New York Times, Washington Post, CBS News and NBS stations and the self-defense of Vietnam classified as "out law" and accused of "killing Americans" in their land. The media perpetuates reporting that the U.S. role of the war "credible" and they were victims of. After having such media supported propaganda, U.S. could rain endless bombs on rural dwellers if Vietnam and killed millions of peasants.

Laos and Cambodia were other potential attack subjects of the region. The U.S. foreign policy, targeting destroying Communism and its fossils, propagandizing that United States intervention was for democracy, they become subject of mass-destruction.

In Iraq and Turkey, on the other phase of propaganda, in relation to Kurds, of propaganda, having a special affinity, when Turkey kills

Turk Kurds, it is not as such an agenda, but when Iraq kills Iraqi Kurds it pops-out and explodes as big news to demonize the government of Saddam Hussein.

El Salvador, on the other hand, was another client U.S.A and will be unworthy, however and equivalent event will be magnified in Nicaragua. Hence, Chomsky and Harman exerted an effort to show the fraudulent and convenient fabrication of accounts becomes institutionalized.

### Hegemonic Discourse of Neo-liberalism: Not the 'Game' but the 'Rule'

In American foreign policy neo-liberalism has granted much. In liberalist nation a media are also granted "limitless" freedom to exercise journalism. In such social plethora, owners of media work to curve the "Rule" well than to stick on the game-type. The game can be whatever, but the rule is determinant to the trophy. Therefore, in the name of 'free market' and 'the right of opinion expression' they curve the rule that unquestionably serve the interest of elites. The architects of the rule, not the game, use it to mobilize and divert promote and oppress, legitimize and endorse in the dreams of dominant groups and dominating social institutions [6].

### Weakness of the PM

The radical left Chomsky and Herman, though devised five "filters" those are the pillars of the book which serve as news selection criteria in U.S. These are:

- The size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation;
- Advertising as a primary income;
- "Flake" as a means of disciplining the media
- The reliance of media on government information and
- 'Anti-Communism' as control mechanism.

Indeed, the first "filter", ownership and the idea of profit maximization is quite representative of the U.S main stream. "Flake" as a mechanism to harass opponents is also some how explanatory. Moreover, as there is an East-West ideological struggle, the America media do not even like to hear about "Communism". Therefore, in any opportunity they want to demonize or hung on a public wall of the East ideology called Communism [7,8].

But 'advertising' as sifting tool is not well justified because the media can not live without ads, or the authors failed to suggest alternative income source. In addition to this, they labeled media dependency on official's information. Indeed, government body is the main source of economic, social and political news, so how could this fact be denied?

Blumler and Gurevitch's proposition may fill the gaps. They propose as (1) degree of mass media partisan ship; and (2) degree of government control over media organization can best structure the "filters" [9-11].

In short, let me put weakness of it

- Generalizing the rational behavior of some journalists and editors-inability to acknowledge ethical staffs.
- Viewing everything as a deep rooted structural problem.

Being deterministic-ignores handful vital incidents lacks logically

consistent premises and pessimism, and failure to locate alternative media system.

- Huge reliance on information used to condemn the mainstream media alone-lack of verification.
- The PM argues that the elite AGENDA-SETTING media legitimize dominant ideological principles of dominant elites (Herman and Chomsky 1988) but here they conclude every aspect of media agenda is elites hegemonic discourse without demarcating a boundary between which one is elite market hegemony and which one is intended for national and social interest [12].

### Summary

Though PM has its own drawbacks in taking various controllable and uncontrollable factors, in explaining, critiquing and understanding the existing U.S mainstream media structure, propaganda model remains a very workable framework. It tries to deconstruct hegemonic bias of elite "reality" over the mass reality. Therefore, I couldn't find any other model or theory that may drift it out and be applicable to the contemporary media system in U.S.

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