



The Herman–Chomsky Propaganda Model: A Critical Approach to Analysing Mass Media Behaviour

Andrew Mullen and Jeffery Klaehn*

Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne and University of Strathclyde

Abstract

The Propaganda Model (PM), developed by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky and published in *Manufacturing Consent* in 1988, sought to explain the behaviour of the mass media in the United States. Analysing the function, operation and effects of the media are essential to any understanding of contemporary societies and the article begins by sketching out the contours of the liberal-pluralist vs. critical-Marxist debate about the role of the media. The article then presents an overview of the PM, locates it within the field of media and communication studies, considers its reception, discusses a number of complementary methodological and theoretical approaches, and argues that the PM, more than 20 years after its formulation, continues to provide an invaluable tool for understanding the media within contemporary capitalist societies.

Introduction

The Propaganda Model (PM), which sought to explain the behaviour of the mass media in the United States, was developed by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky in *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, published in 1988. Firmly rooted in the critical-Marxist, more specifically the political economy, tradition of media and communication studies, the PM, or more specifically its reception within the field, is somewhat of a paradox. In terms of its application, mainly by those working within the aforementioned tradition, the PM is one of the most tested models within the social sciences. However, it has received very little attention within mainstream media and communication studies, sociology or the wider social sciences. This article introduces the liberal-pluralist vs. critical-Marxist debate about the role of the media in contemporary societies, presents an overview of the PM, locates it within the field of media and communication studies, and discusses its reception, discusses a number of complementary methodological and theoretical approaches and argues that the PM, more than 20 years after its formulation, continues to provide an invaluable tool for understanding the media within contemporary capitalist societies.

Understanding society, politics and the media

If the job of sociologists is to understand and explain the development, stratification and functioning of societies, then attention must be paid to how members of those societies communicate. More specifically, given the long-standing hierarchical nature of societies, there is a need to analyse what, how and why the elites in societies communicate with the masses and what this means for the structures of power. In simplistic terms, there are two diametrically opposed perspectives on how power is distributed within contemporary, capitalist, liberal-democratic societies and what the role of the media, as an

important form of communication, is within such societies: the liberal-pluralist view and the critical-Marxist view.

The liberal-pluralist view of how political systems operate within capitalist, liberal-democratic societies suggests that there exists a healthy ‘marketplace of ideas’ (Ginsberg 1986). In other words, there exist different opinions, policy proposals, worldviews, etc., that translate in turn into choices for the general publics. Moreover, the most popular of these will be reflected in the laws and policies adopted by political systems (a view which, on the surface, echoes the structural-functionalist conception of social organization). The liberal-pluralist view of how media systems work in such societies is based upon the notion that the media constitute a ‘fourth estate’. Put simply, it is claimed that the media serve as guardians of the public interest and as ‘watchdogs’ on the exercise of power; the media thereby contribute significantly to a system of checks and balances that comprise the modern democratic system.

Going beyond the classical and modern elitism theories put forward by Pareto (1935), Mosca (1939), Burnham (1941), Michels (1949), C. Wright Mills (1956) and Schumpeter (1976), the critical-Marxist critique of political systems in capitalist, liberal-democratic societies purports that it reflects the class-based nature of those societies and the laws and policies that are enacted are those that serve to bring about and to maintain ruling class domination and exploitation. The critical-Marxist account of media systems in such societies posits that:

... the media are ... part of an ideological arena in which various class views are fought out, although within the context of the dominance of certain classes; ultimate control is increasingly concentrated in monopoly capital; media professionals, while enjoying the illusion of autonomy, are socialized into and internalize the norms of the dominant culture; the media, taken as a whole, relate interpretive frameworks consonant with the interests of the dominant classes, and media audiences, while sometimes negotiating and contesting these frameworks, lack ready access to alternative meaning systems that would enable them to reject the definitions offered by the media in favour of consistently oppositional definitions (Gurevitch et al. 1982, p.2).

This debate, concerning the role of media in society, is the primary focus of the PM.

In the 1960s, a number of scholars revisited classical Marxist thinking on ideology, in particular the notion that ‘the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas’ (Marx and Engels 1970; [1845], p.64) and they began to develop new concepts in an attempt to understand and explain the role of the media in modern democratic societies. In particular, the work of Antonio Gramsci (1971) and, later, of the scholars associated with the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research (Marcuse 1968; Adorno and Horkheimer 1972) provided the basis for the critical-Marxist tradition. This work effectively bolstered the ‘mass society’ paradigm that dominated the first phase of mass media effects research from the early 1920s to the late 1930s: that of powerful direct media effects and passive media audiences. Subsequent generations of critical and Marxist scholars, however, rejected the pessimistic stance of the Frankfurt School and its ‘mass society’ thesis. They also questioned the conclusions drawn from the empirical data generated during the 1940s, 1950s and early 1960s, the second phase of effects research, which seemed to indicate that exposure to the media had ‘minimal consequences’. Instead, and as part of the third phase of effects research, from the mid 1960s, they insisted that the media were powerful in their effects, albeit in ways which were contingent and mediated. Nevertheless, these scholars were far from unified as Curran et al. (1982), p.23) recorded: ‘Marxist theorists vary in their accounts of the determination of the mass media and in their accounts of the nature and power of mass media ideologies.’ There were two key

debates: the nature of the relationship between the (economic) base and the (socio-political) superstructure, and the question of ‘relative autonomy’ (of ideology, the media, the state, etc.). Curran et al. distinguished three main perspectives: structuralism (Althusser 1969, 1971; Poulantzas 1975), the political economy approach (Murdock 1982) and cultural studies (Hall 1980).

The political economy approach concentrated upon the issues of media ownership and control (Murdock and Golding 1977; Murdock 1982; Curran and Seaton 1991) and was initially concerned with media effects. As Curran et al. (1982) explained, however, ‘the workings of these controls are not easy to demonstrate – or to examine empirically. The evidence is quite often is circumstantial and is derived from the ‘fit’ between the ideology implicit in the [media] message and the [economic and political] interests of those in control.’ This problematic encouraged many scholars, including Herman and Chomsky, to focus upon media *behaviour* rather than media *effects*, hence the PM. Nevertheless, more than 20 years after its publication confusion abounds on this crucial distinction and it is, perhaps, easy to see why. Consider, for example, this excerpt from the Preface:

If ... the powerful are able to fix the premises of discourse, to decide what the general populace is allowed to see, hear and think about, and to ‘manage’ public opinion by regular propaganda campaigns, the standard [liberal-pluralist] view of how the media system works is at serious odds with reality. (Herman and Chomsky 1988, p.xi)

Or this, from the opening paragraph:

The mass media serve as a system for communicating messages and symbols to the general populace. It is their function to amuse, entertain, inform and inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs and codes of behaviour that will integrate them into the institutional structures of the larger society. In a world of concentrated wealth and major conflicts of class interest, to fulfil this role requires systematic propaganda. (Ibid. p.1)

Indeed, the very title of the book, *Manufacturing Consent*, and their frequent reference throughout to the ‘propaganda system’, suggests that the PM is concerned with effects. Although Herman and Chomsky have attended to the societal function of ideology and propaganda as an effective means of social control elsewhere in their work (Chomsky 1989; Herman, 1999), the PM is solely concerned with the questions of media performance and poses a direct challenge to the liberal-pluralist view of how the media work.

The Propaganda Model

The PM represents a ‘general theory of the Free Press’, and it offers an institutional critique of mass media behaviour (see Klaehn 2002, 2003a,b, 2005, 2008). Like other approaches within the critical-Marxist tradition, it is concerned with exploring the relationships between ideology, communicative power and social class interests. More specifically, attending to the interlocks that exist between the media, dominant social institutions, powerful elites and the market, the PM explores the interplay between economic power and communicative power. The fundamental argument put forward in the PM is that structural, political-economic elements influence overall patterns of media performance. However, there is not a conspiracy theory of media behaviour; rather, at the outset of *Manufacturing Consent*, Herman and Chomsky (1988):xii emphasize that the PM presents a ‘free market analysis’ of mainstream media, ‘with the results largely the outcome of the working of market forces.’ Importantly, the PM challenges commonly held notions that media are liberal and dedicated to the public interest. Instead, it suggests that

the structural contexts in which news discourses are produced are such that media themselves are predisposed to serve propaganda functions within capitalist, liberal-democratic societies.

News production processes are shaped by a range of factors, encapsulated by the ‘filter elements’ associated with the PM (see Klaehn 2002, 2003a,b, 2005). The PM predicts that these filter elements impact upon what becomes news. The five filter elements are (1) the ownership, size and profit orientation of mainstream media; (2) advertising as the principle source of revenue for mainstream media and the corresponding influence of advertising values on news production processes; (3) mainstream media’s routine reliance on agents of power as the primary definers of social reality; (4) organized *flak* that represents a mechanism of social control; and (5) various ideological forces, which may be deployed and adapted to correspond to elite interests when required (see Herman and Chomsky 1988:1–35; Klaehn 2002, 2003a,b, 2005, 2008).

Since its publication, several scholars have presented evidence in support of the central hypotheses of the PM (Herman 1982, 1985, 1992; Parenti 1986; Herman and O’Sullivan 1989; Aronson 1990; Lee and Solomon 1990; Chomsky 1991; Winter 1992, 1998, 2002, 2007; Gunn 1994; McMurtry 1998; Hammond and Herman 2000; Herman and Chomsky 2002; Herring and Robinson 2003b; Boyd-Barrett 2004; Babe 2005; Klaehn 2005; Winter and Klaehn 2005; Phillips 2007). Furthermore, although they did not utilize the PM, a number of other scholars in Britain and the United States concurred that the mass media tended to manufacture consent for elite preferences, both in terms of domestic and foreign policy issues (Miliband 1969; Domhoff 1979; Curtis 1984; Glasgow University Media 1985; Hallin 1986; Hollingsworth 1986; Bennett 1990; Entman 1991; Philo and McLaughlin 1993; Carruthers 1995; Zaller and Chui 1996; Lashmar and Oliver 1998; Mermin 1999; Greenslade 2003; Knightley 2003; Miller 2004; Altheide 2006; Andersen 2006). While the PM has been applied within the Canadian and US contexts, and while Edwards and Cromwell (2006), plus David Miller (in Klaehn 2006), have alluded to its explanatory potential in terms of the British media, there has been no attempt to systematically test the PM within the British context. Indeed, one critic questioned whether it ‘could be applied in countries with very different media systems and political structures’ (Corner 2003, p.367). Nevertheless, studies by Doherty (2005) and Mullen (forthcoming, a) produced evidence that suggested that it may indeed be applicable in Britain and, by extension, elsewhere.

The marginalization of the Propaganda Model

Since its publication in 1988, the PM has received very little attention within the field of media and communication studies, the wider social sciences or the mainstream media – as Herman and Chomsky had in fact initially predicted. Just as they made first-order predictions about how the media perform, Herman and Chomsky advanced a second-order prediction about how the PM would be received by the mainstream media and within academia; in short, they suggested that it would be ignored. It is not surprising, given the nature of the PM and its premises, that the mainstream media should marginalize it. In Britain, for example, MediaLens (2004) reported that, since 1988, the PM had been mentioned only once in *The Guardian* – Britain’s most liberal broadsheet – while a Lexis-Nexis database search found just ten mentions in other British newspapers during this period. What is more surprising, however, is that many academics, who all too often insist upon their objectivity and rigour, have also disregarded the PM. Out of 3053 articles sampled from ten media and communication journals published in Europe and North

America over the 1988–2007 period, only 79 articles (representing 2.6% of the total) attended to the PM. Importantly, rather than engaging with the PM, most of these articles merely included a reference to *Manufacturing Consent* in their bibliographies. Likewise, out of 48 media and communication texts – typically used on British undergraduate and postgraduate media and communication courses – surveyed during the 1990–2007 period, only 11 (representing 22.9%) actually engaged with the PM (usually a few lines or paragraphs) and, of these, only four texts contained an extensive discussion. The vast majority either ignored the PM (43.8%) or merely included *Manufacturing Consent* in their bibliographies (33.3%) (Mullen forthcoming, b).

Looking in more detail at the scholarship that *did* consider the PM – more specifically the criticisms levelled at Herman and Chomsky and the PM – it is possible to identify two distinct phases. The first wave of criticism – in the late 1980s, following the book's publication, and in the 1990s – was marked by hostility, indifference and/or an outright dismissal of the PM and its findings. The second wave of criticism, from the early 2000s, witnessed a greater engagement with the PM that resulted in a number of important debates.

The first wave of criticism: dismissal (late 1980s and early 1990s)

During the first wave of criticism of the PM, many commentators and scholars, on both the political liberal-left end of the spectrum and on the political right, generally dismissed the model. In their book reviews of *Manufacturing Consent* and cursory discussions of the PM, these writers charged that the PM overstated the power of the 'propaganda system' and downplayed popular opposition to elite preferences (LeFeber 1988); presented a 'conspiratorial' view of the media (Lemann 1989; Entman 1990a,b; Nelson 1990); constituted a blunt instrument for analysis (Schudson 1989); was 'political' (Salmon 1989); was deterministic, functionalist and simplistic (Schlesinger 1989; Golding and Murdock 1991; Eldridge 1993); and neglected the impact of journalistic professionalism (Goodwin 1994; Hallin 1994). It is important to note that most of these commentators and scholars did not engage with the PM on its own terms, ascribing to it claims that Herman and Chomsky never made, and they studiously avoided the evidence marshalled by Herman and Chomsky, offering no alternative explanations to account for the observed performance of the media. Such blatant avoidance flies in the face of good social science, wherein scholars critique the premises and findings of each others' research. Such criticisms were addressed and rebutted by Herman (1990, 1996, 2000), Klaehn (2002, 2003a,b, 2008) and Herman and Chomsky (forthcoming).

The second wave of criticism: engagement (early 2000s)

During the second wave of criticism, there was much greater engagement with the PM and a number of more substantial arguments were advanced. Relating to its methodology and findings, these criticisms resulted in a number of debates.

John Corner vs. Jeffery Klaehn (2002-03). The first exchange on the PM took place between John Corner and Jeffery Klaehn in the *European Journal of Communication* in 2002 and 2003. Having rejected many of the early criticisms levelled against the PM – its 'conspiratorial' view of the media, determinism and functionalism, similarity to the gatekeeper model, neglect of journalistic professionalism, failure to theorize media effects, and assumption of unified ruling class interests, Klaehn (2002) restated the case for the PM, focusing upon the five filters and its methodological approach.

In response, Corner (2003) doubted whether the PM, devised to explain the performance of the media in the United States, ‘could be applied in countries with very different media systems and political structures’ (Ibid. p.367). Second, Corner questioned what new theoretical insight the PM could bring to European media research. Third, Corner complained that the five filters were ‘assumed to function without much, if any, need for further specification or qualification’ and resulted in a ‘totalizing and finalizing view’ of media performance (Ibid. p.369). Fourth, Corner critiqued the notion of a ‘filter’ and asked whether the filtering process itself produced the resulting media messages or merely served to modify what has already been produced. Fifth, Corner charged that proponents of the PM ignore the long-standing European media research tradition, rooted in critical-Marxist analyses, on media-state-market relations. In short, these proponents do not situate the PM within this tradition, nor acknowledge the antecedents upon which the PM is founded. Sixth, Corner questioned whether the PM supported or rejected liberal principles (such as journalistic professionalism); whether media workers involved in the propaganda system were conscious of its operation and effects; and whether, by deploying notions such as ‘brainwashing under freedom’ and ‘thought control’, the PM was indeed concerned with media effects rather than just media behaviour.

In a further response, Klaehn (2003b) re-emphasized the attractiveness of the PM from a social science perspective, specifically the ease with which its predictions could be empirically tested. Unlike Corner, who characterized the PM as ‘closed’, Klaehn argued that the operation of the five filters was contingent and variable; the PM was thus relatively flexible and ‘open,’ according to Klaehn.

Klaehn (2003b) chastised Corner for not recognizing the limitations of the PM, acknowledged by its creators, and stated that the PM did not seek to explain all aspects of media performance. Instead of rejecting the PM from a conceptual-theoretical perspective, Klaehn encouraged scholars to test the hypotheses that Herman and Chomsky put forward.

Forum on Chomsky: Eric Herring and Piers Robinson (2003). In a special issue of the *Review of International Studies* in 2003 (Volume 29), a number of scholars debated the significance of Chomsky’s work within the field of international relations. Herring and Robinson (2003a), p.551) stated that

Once we started to read Chomsky’s work, we concluded that there was a great deal to be learned from it. However, when we began to draw on it, we came up against widespread hostility towards his work combined with both ignorance and misrepresentation of what he writes.

In a further article, Herring and Robinson (2003b) observed that the work of Hallin (1986) and Bennett (1990) – who advanced an indexing hypothesis regarding media-state relations – shared the same analytical framework as Herman and Chomsky. Nevertheless, an examination of eight major studies on the media and US foreign policy found that ‘they only cite Hallin and/or Bennett, but not Herman and Chomsky, despite offering arguments and conclusions that overlap heavily with those of Herman and Chomsky’ (Herring and Robinson 2003b, p.558). In seeking to explain this marginalization, Herring and Robinson dismissed the personalized explanation – Chomsky’s apparent ‘polemical style’ – and offered instead an institutional explanation: the operation of the flak filter, which discouraged anti-elite analyses and perspectives, given that universities are the part of the corporate-state nexus.

Oliver Boyd-Barrett and the Sixth Filter (2004). Boyd-Barrett (2004), p.436), who accepted the basic premises of the PM, complained that the PM did not ‘identify

methodologies for determining the relative weight of independent filters in different contexts'; lamented the 'lack of precision in the characterization of some of the filters' in the PM; bemoaned the fact that the PM privileged structural factors and 'eschews or marginalizes intentionality'; and called for the revision of the PM along these lines. More specifically, in terms of sourcing and flak, Boyd-Barrett recommended greater attention to journalistic departures from, rather than routine conformity with, the preferences of official sources, and further study of journalistic fears of flak from editors, the right-wing media and government officials. Boyd-Barrett also suggested a sixth filter: the 'buying out' of individual journalists or their media by intelligence agencies, other government bodies and/or special interest groups. Disputing Chomsky's stance on 'conspiracy theory', Boyd-Barrett pointed to the 1970s US Senate investigations and the 'irrefutable evidence of wide-scale, covert CIA penetration of media – by definition, an illustration of 'conspiracy' at work' (Ibid. p.436).

Kurt Lang and Gladys Lang vs. Herman and Chomsky (2004). The second exchange on the PM took place between Kurt and Gladys Lang and Herman and Chomsky in the *Political Communication* journal in 2004. Lang and Lang (2004a) challenged the theoretical adequacy of the PM and questioned whether it approximated how the media function. The Langs advanced a number of criticisms. They argued that Herman and Chomsky were seeking to make a political point in presenting their empirical data and suggested that the authors neglected to provide information about their sampling and coding procedures. They doubted the 'the viability of a model about 'the media' in general based on anecdotal evidence' (Lang and Lang 2004a, p.95) and challenged Herman and Chomsky's use of the term 'genocide' in their 2002 edition of *Manufacturing Consent*. The Langs complained that Herman and Chomsky did not inquire how events became news and charged that they assumed that information existed but had been screened out of media production systems. While acknowledging that media production processes are routinized, pointing to the symbiotic relationship between producers (sources) and conveyors (editors and journalists), the Langs argued that such relations frequently become adversarial when interests diverged. Furthermore, media owners often take risks and put out materials that politicians may indeed wish remained concealed. In short, there is much interaction, both collaborative and confrontational, between conveyors and sources. The Langs also suggested that media play an important informational roles and the professional norms of journalists help to prevent media from becoming a mere mouthpiece for elite interests. The Langs also pointed out that media provide forums for alternative points of view, particularly when divisions within the elite and significant (oppositional) political movements exist. Following this, the Langs suggested that to talk of a 'propaganda system' evades the fact that Chomsky can and does get his 'deviant point of view' (Ibid. p.97) into the 'public domain' through the very media he criticizes.

In relation to coverage of events occurring outside the US, the Langs suggest that there are cultural, institutional and linguistic constraints which increase 'the dependence of journalists on embassy personnel and on other experts, many of whom have connections, past or present, to the government.' However, they argued that these constraints, which are consistent with the PM, are 'less limiting when it comes to covering events at home' (Ibid.). The Langs made the point that media are themselves active players in elite conflicts, and some of these struggles do involve criticisms of media performance. They also point out that the media cover and often scrutinize corporate scandals and the failures and misdeeds of the United States and its allies. Finally, they suggest that Chomsky misquoted the work of Walter Lippman and others concerning the role and function of propaganda in society.

In their reply to the Langs, Herman and Chomsky (2004a) raised a number of concerns. They complained about the Langs unjustifiably conflating the PM with Chomsky's political views. Herman and Chomsky declared that their sampling and coding procedures were clear and the empirical data could be checked; it was not anecdotal. Herman and Chomsky defended their use of the term 'genocide' and accused the Langs of political bias in raising this point – consistent with media's own bias about 'worthy' and 'unworthy' victims. They argued that they had tested the PM using a range of case studies that were important in themselves and that received prominent media coverage. They did not strategically seek out promising cases. In response to the Langs' claim that they did not focus on the media production process, they argued that:

Since we focus on how the available evidence was selected and interpreted, we were very definitely concerned with how newsworthy facts are located, who the media rely on as sources, how critically they treat them, what forces determine what is newsworthy in the first place – and how stories are inflated, repeated or dropped, and how politically convenient fabrications may survive and even become institutionalized. Our model deals with these matters explicitly in describing sourcing processes, flak, ideology and other matters. But we put our main emphasis on the empirical results of media selection processes, which are crucial facts about the media (Ibid. p.105).

Herman and Chomsky noted that the Langs offered no explanations for the radically different media treatment of 'worthy' and unworthy' victims, and Chomsky defended his interpretation and use of the work of Lippmann and others.

In response to Herman and Chomsky, Lang and Lang (2004b) argued that media production processes are negotiated products (social constructions) and are not controlled. They again questioned the empirical data presented by Herman and Chomsky and (again) challenged Herman and Chomsky's use of the term 'genocide'. Herman and Chomsky (2004b), in turn, responded to each of these points and rectified the mistakes made by the Langs.

Robert Barsky vs. Gabriel Noah Brahm (2006). The third exchange on the PM took place between Robert Barsky and Gabriel Noah Brahm in 2006 within the journal *Critical Studies in Media Communication*. Where Barsky (2006) celebrated Chomsky's radicalism, Noah Brahm (2006) dismissed him and argued that Chomsky typified a 'dangerous' intellectual trend – authoritarian, narcissistic and obsessive – governed by 'an uptight psychology' (Ibid. p.454). In terms of the PM, Noah Brahm complained that Herman and Chomsky had ignored the insights generated by cultural studies (for example, Barthes on semiotics, Marcuse on ideology and Foucault on discourse) over the last 20 years. However, as with the output during the earlier phase of criticism, Noah Brahm avoided engaging with the substance of the PM.

Colin Sparks and the Revision of the Propaganda Model (2007). Sparks (2007), who, like Boyd-Barrett, was also broadly in agreement with the PM, challenged Herman and Chomsky's claims about elite consensus and dissensus, questioning the strategic-tactical dichotomy they posited, and insisted that, not only are the capitalist class frequently divided on account of their particularistic interests, but the economic and political systems of other countries are quite different from that of the United States. (on which the original PM was based). In Europe, for example, Sparks highlighted the existence of significant left-wing parties, the centrality of public service broadcasters, the reality of sizeable working class electorates and the impact of competitive press markets responding to partisan and socially stratified polities. As a consequence of these, Sparks argued that 'we would expect to find ... a much wider and far-ranging set of arguments in the media

than simply in-house disputes between different wings of the capitalist class' (Ibid. p.74). Sparks emphasized the need to differentiate between the performance and role of the elite media compared to the mass media; argued that source dependence did not guarantee journalistic compliance – as elite sources may be disarticulated and divided thus opening up the space for alternative, non-corporate and non-state sources; and stipulated that journalists, on account of their class position as wage labourers, sometimes resist and contest the dictates of governments, managers and owners.

Complementary methodological approaches and theories

One of the repeated criticisms of the PM is that its frequent reference to the operation of a 'propaganda system' implies that it is concerned with media effects rather than media performance. While this is untrue, as has been discussed, Herman and Chomsky are the first to point out that the PM may well be compatible with other methodological approaches and theories within the fields of media effects and media performance research. The insights gleaned from agenda-setting, framing and indexing theory, for example, could bolster the PM, enrich its analytical capability – certainly in terms of micro-analysis – and could help to move the debate on by 'mainstreaming' the PM and using it as a foundation for future media studies, rather than ignoring or marginalizing it as has been the case thus far. However, just as the literature on the indexing hypothesis ignored the work of Herman and Chomsky (Herring and Robinson 2003b), so the literature on agenda-setting and framing has ignored the PM. Nevertheless, synergies may be possible. Insights gleaned from agenda-setting and framing, for example, potentially provide the micro-level of analysis of the media production process that could augment the macro-analysis of the PM. Furthermore, these approaches could also be used to test media effects and thus, together with the PM, provide a holistic framework for analysing the 'propaganda system' and its efficacy.

The continued relevance of the Propaganda Model

In the updated 2002 edition of *Manufacturing Consent*, Herman and Chomsky attended to some of the economic, political and technological transformations that had occurred since the book's original publication in 1988. In terms of economic factors, they highlighted:

...the media's gradual centralization and concentration, the growth of media conglomerates that control many different kinds of media ... and the spread of the media across borders in a globalization process. [They] also noted the gradual displacement of family control by professional managers serving a wider array of owners and more closely subject to market discipline (Herman and Chomsky 2002, p.xiii).

The end result was that 'two-dozen firms control nearly the entirety of media experienced by most US citizens' (Ibid.). Herman and Chomsky also argue that, as a consequence of neo-liberal globalization processes, the media have actively encouraged governments in the West, together with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, to open up media markets across the globe, thus further entrenching their dominance. They point to increased commercialization of global media and its promotion of consumerism. They describe the deleterious impact of increased competition, deregulation and privatization on the non-commercial media and public service broadcasting, arguing that those which remained were increasingly forced to emulate commercial systems.

In terms of political factors, Herman and Chomsky conceded that the end of the Cold War effectively undermined the anti-communist ideology that so figured in their earlier writings. Nevertheless,

... this is easily offset by the greater ideological force of the belief in the ‘miracle of the market’ ... 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, so that regardless of evidence, markets are assumed to be benevolent and even democratic ... and non-market mechanisms are suspect ... Journalism has internalized this ideology. Adding it to the residual power of anti-communism in a world in which the global power of market institutions makes non-market options seem utopian gives us an ideological package of immense strength (Ibid. pp.xvii–xviii).

To this may be added the ideological power of the ‘war on terror’ and the ‘us and them’ dichotomy, promoted by many academics, journalists and politicians across the political spectrum, which have helped to galvanize public support for elite interests since the end of the Cold War.

In terms of technological factors, Herman and Chomsky reflect upon arguments that ‘the Internet and the new communications technologies are breaking the corporate stranglehold on journalism and opening an unprecedented era of interactive democratic media’ (Ibid. p.xv). While acknowledging that the new media have increased the efficiency and scope of individual and group networking, resulting in some important victories for protest movements, they suggest that such a claim is not justified as

... [The Internet] has limitations as a critical tool. For one thing, those whose information needs are most acute are not well served by the Internet – many lack access, its databases are not designed to meet their needs, and the use of databases (and effective use of the Internet in general) presupposes knowledge and organization. [Furthermore] the privatization of the Internet’s hardware, the rapid commercialization and concentration of Internet portals and servers and their integration into non-Internet conglomerates – the AOL-Time Warner merger was a giant step in that direction – and the private and concentrated control of the new broadband technology, together threaten to limit any future prospects of the Internet as a democratic media vehicle (Ibid, p.xvi).

These developments are compounded by the ‘rapid penetration of the Internet by the leading newspapers and media conglomerates, all fearful of being outflanked by small pioneer users of the new technology and willing (and able) to accept losses for years while testing out these new waters’ (Ibid). In short, the traditional media, dominated by corporations, are now colonizing the new media.

The net result, Herman and Chomsky reasoned, is that the five filters, and thus the explanatory powers of the PM, had been strengthened, rather than diminished, by such developments. Ownership, the first filter, had become more concentrated than it was in 1988. Advertising, the second filter, had become more important as the global media became increasingly commercialized, seeking out new ways to sell products by expanding into the new media. Sourcing, the third filter, continued to be dominated by corporate and government bodies – witness, for example, the emergence of ‘embedded journalists’ during recent wars (Miller 2004), the covert media operations before and during the 2003 Iraq war (Barstow 2008), and the ‘full spectrum dominance’ objective of the strategic communication documents issued by the US government, etc. (United States Department of Defense 2000, 2004; Winseck 2008). Flak, the fourth filter, remained an effective weapon in the hands of elites (Winter 2007:121–178), while anti-communism,

the fifth filter, had been superseded by the ideology of ‘the market’ (see Klaehn forthcoming). In short, ‘the changes in politics and communication over the past dozen years have tended on balance to enhance the applicability of the ‘Propaganda Model’ (Herman and Chomsky 2002, p.xvii).

To focus upon one of the filters, sourcing, Herman and Chomsky stated that ‘studies of news sources reveal that a significant proportion of news originates in public relations releases. There are, by one count, 20 000 more public relations agents working to doctor the news today than there are journalists writing it’ (Ibid.). Further evidence to support this view was advanced by Davies (2008a) who commissioned research which surveyed more than 2000 British news stories from the four quality dailies (*Times*, *Telegraph*, *Guardian*, *Independent*) and the *Daily Mail*. The researchers found that only 12% of the stories were wholly composed of material researched by reporters. Eighty percentage of the stories were wholly, mainly or partially constructed from second-hand material provided by news agencies and by the public relations industry. They also found that facts had been thoroughly checked in only 12% of the stories. Davies commented that:

The implication of those two findings is truly alarming. Where once journalists were active gatherers of news, now they have generally become mere passive processors of unchecked, second-hand material, much of it contrived by PR to serve some political or commercial interest. Not journalists, but chumalists. An industry whose primary task is to filter out falsehood has become so vulnerable to manipulation that it is now involved in the mass production of falsehood, distortion and propaganda (Davies 2008b).

Conclusion

Within the context of the social sciences, the PM constitutes a critical-structural model. It is in the first instance concerned to explore the interplay between power, social structure and ideology. Social inequalities within the broader society and social world are highlighted by the PM. It is fundamentally democratic and advocates scholarship that is accessible and can be read and understood by specialist and non-specialist audiences alike. The PM is oriented towards empirical research and can be readily and easily applied to news discourses relating to any number of international or domestic topics and social issues. We argue that it ought to be formally subsumed within the general framework of conflict theory, and we would suggest that mainstream sociology will be greatly enhanced vis-à-vis its formalized inclusion within the discipline. Given the globalizing economy and the ever-increasing (global) power, reach and influence of large, transnational corporate and financial institutions – in the face of growing poverty and powerlessness amongst the vast majority of the world’s population – we would suggest that the PM is even more relevant today than when it was initially advanced.

Short Biographies

Dr. Andrew Mullen is a senior lecturer in politics in the Department of Social Science at Northumbria University in Newcastle-upon-Tyne (Britain). His research interests include the history and politics of European integration, the history and politics of the British Left, international political economy, Western foreign policy, and the media and propaganda. His publications include *The British Left’s ‘Great Debate’ on Europe* (Continuum, 2007), *The 1975 Referendum on Europe* (Imprint Academic, 2007), *Anti- and Pro-European Propaganda in Britain* (Continuum, forthcoming) and *The Political Economy of the European*

Social Model (Routledge, forthcoming). He has his own website (<http://www.andymullen.com>) and can be contacted at andrew.mullen@northumbria.ac.uk.

Dr Jeffery Klaehn is a widely published author and cultural commentator. His scholarly writings have been published in national and international peer-reviewed journals, including the *European Journal of Communication*, *Journalism Studies* and *International Communication Gazette*. He is the editor of several scholarly books, including *Filtering the News: Essays on Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model* (2005), *Bound by Power: Intended Consequences* (2006), *Roadblocks to Equality: Women Challenging Boundaries* (2008) and *The Political-Economy of Media and Power* (2010). He serves on the editorial boards for the *Journal of Global Mass Communication*, *ImageTexT: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies* and *Fifth-Estate-Online: The International Journal of Radical Mass Media Criticism*. He can be contacted at jklaehn@gmail.com and has a SourceWatch page which may be accessed here: http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Jeffery_Klaehn.

Note

* Correspondence address: Dr Jeffery Klaehn, 16 Richmond Street, Glasgow G1 1XQ, Scotland, UK. E-mail: jklaehn@gmail.com

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