

News of Friends Versus News of Foes: Does the Media Report Similar Events Similarly?

In *Manufacturing Consent* (2002) Edward Herman & Noam Chomsky (H&C) give us the Propaganda Model, whose core claim is that "...the Media serve, and propagandize on behalf of, the powerful societal interests that control and finance them." H&C also give us the paired case study method by which to assess media bias.

In the spirit of the Enlightenment, let's neither blindly accept nor blindly reject what H&C tell us. Rather, let's collect facts and apply logic and draw our own conclusions. Does a methodologically rigorous analysis of the facts support the claim of media bias?

In this assignment you will apply the paired case study method to two similar events,

1. the poisoning of former Russian spy, Sergei Skipral (allegedly done by Russia, a foe of the US) [[Wikipedia](#)]
2. the assassinations of various Iranian nuclear scientists (allegedly done by Israel, a close ally of the US.) [[wikipedia](#)]

We use these case studies to learn about our object of study: The *New York Times* (NYT). Does NYT reporting simply reflect the news, or does it reflect the interests of US government (foreign policy elites)? If NYT reporting reflects the news, similar cases (such as ours) should be reported similarly (in quantity and quality.) If reporting is "propaganda" for "manufacturing consent", then cases that are seemingly similar but that differ in their implications for US foreign policy may be reported quite differently so as to influence the US public to consent to elite decision-making. In social science terms, the dependent variable (the effect) is NYT reporting, and the independent variable (the cause) is either objective facts or elite interests.

In your paper you should first summarize the Propaganda Model and the paired case study method. This summary may be up to a third of your paper.

Then you should perform both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Note that there is too much news coverage to read each article in detail. You must reduce the data. Here are a few suggestions:

- Read all headlines
- Read many opening paragraphs
- Read the full body of the most promising articles
- Search the texts to find key words (e.g. adjectives used to describe victims.)

Analysis:

- Quantitative: see Table 2.1.
- Qualitative:
  - Identify key qualitative terms (use the search function to count those terms, too)
  - designations of worthy and unworthy victims
  - use of passive and active voice
  - what narrative forms are used? E.g. a heartbreaking story of one person, or a triumphant victory-story about triumph over a foe.

Tell the reader whether the data either strongly supports (or refutes,) weakly supports (or refutes,) or allows no conclusion for the Propaganda Model. You might conclude the paper by relating this particular research to the four themes of this course.

In writing the paper you may discuss the cases with fellow students, but you must author the paper alone. Do not print the articles, as there are too many pages.

Length: 7 pages (not including cover or references,) double spaced, and *numbered*. PDF format.