

The Propaganda Model in the Early 21st Century

Part II

JOAN PEDRO

Universidad Complutense de Madrid

This two-part article explores Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model from diverse angles, with the aim of deepening its current dynamism and validity for explaining mass media production and content in advanced capitalist democracies. Part I of the contribution studies the contemporary relevance of the five components or "filters" that comprise the model, relates them to ongoing sociohistorical developments, and focuses on the different interactions affecting the media in the context of power relations. It then analyzes the situations in which the spectrum of media opinion is more open. Part II focuses on the validity of the model for explaining news content both in countries other than the United States and on the Internet, as well as for explaining media products other than news. This is followed by an examination of the possibility of expanding and modifying the model by incorporating other factors, which may be considered secondary filters.

1. Synthesis of the Propaganda Model and the Lines of Research to Enhance its Dynamism and Validity

Part I of this contribution explained how, through a structural and institutional analysis, the propaganda model (PM) identifies media patterns of performance and explains why an important feature of news content is the reproduction of the hegemonic interests of the elite. The model focuses on the

inequality of wealth and power and its multi-level effects on mass-media interests and choices. It traces the route by which money and power are able to filter out the news fit to print, marginalize dissent, and allow the government and dominant private interests to get their message across to the public. (Chomsky & Herman, 2002, p. 2)

In this sense, the PM distinguishes different factors that reinforce each other to mold the information which is to be made public, as well as the interconnection and symbiotic relationships between media groups, corporations, and governments that make the independence of the first impossible. The range of the discourse in the media depends on the level of interest that the elite have in the topic. This is why the PM is especially valuable for explaining the coverage of issues in which the elite are fully involved,

Joan Pedro: joan.pedro@pdi.ucm.es

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as in these cases, the media will generally be more constrained by the filters, and therefore be more likely to provide biased information. For example, Klaehn (2005) has studied the coverage in the Canadian press of the events in East Timor (1975–1991), where Canada had important economic and geopolitical interests. The analysis shows that the press minimized the genocide, conveying the official version and omitting Canada's role. The PM is also readily applicable to domestic issues where the elite have a vested interest, such as when dealing with workers' rights, the chemical industry, the health system, budget cuts in social spending, or protests against the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, etc. (Chomsky & Herman, 2002; Herman, 1996, 2000).

In these types of cases, the PM is particularly valid and useful. However, for the study of media representations in cases where the topic addressed has more conflictive or complex dimensions, it is important to consider other specific factors, processes, and relationships consistent with the model that affect the information presented.

According to Sierra (in Sierra & Vázquez, 2006, pp. 20–24), this method of approaching media studies has the virtue of providing six principles or strategic starting points that cannot be ignored in any extensive theoretical study: the constructivist principle, the institutional reading, the symbiotic principle of hegemony, the principle of decentralized and multi-faceted power, the radical theory of democracy, and the ideological analysis of news content. These principles can be considered an important part of the model's epistemological basis and, at the same time, a guide for conducting scientific media research based on the model itself with possibilities of improvement.

Another important dimension to bear in mind is that, in addition to proposing the theoretical model, Herman and Chomsky also offer a method of analysis adapted to that model. On the one hand, the filters can be examined, as they have been in part I of this article. But the influence of the filters on news content can also be tested through empirical studies, comparing the representations of two contemporaneous historical cases and measuring the limits of discourse in the case studies.

As Klaehn (2009) and Klaehn and Mullen (2010) have noted, the PM may be complemented with other approaches concerned with dimensions which impact media performance and contribute to elite control, such as spin and PR strategies, or stereotyped representations of race and ethnicity. Some good examples of how complementary approaches can be of help in understanding media production and contents are Robertson's (2006) analysis of UK TV news drawing from the PM, Said's (1979) orientalism, the feminism of Ang and Hermes (1996) and van Zoonen (1996), the news values model of Galtung and Ruge (1981), and the emerging new sociology of journalism inspired by McNair's (2003) chaos theory, as well as his analysis of the 2008 Budget coverage using the PM, together with Cottle and Rai's (2005) five conflict frames (Robertson, 2008). The usefulness of the PM may also be complemented with Bennet's (1990) and Hallin's (1994) indexing hypothesis, especially with regard to the sourcing filter, as done by Kennis (2011), with the framing paradigm (Entman & Rojecki, 1993), and with critical discourse analysis (see Klaehn, 2008, 2009). Moreover, it could be enriched by relating it to an analysis of the specific logic of capital in the current sociohistorical process, as suggested by Sierra (2006), and following reflections by Cohen & Rogers (1991), Sparks (2007), Freedman (2009), and Thomson (2009), by placing a greater focus on the specific social and market conditions and relations, on contradictions, on divisions and

dysfunctions, on counter-forces, on moments of crisis, and on the gaps and the exceptions, all so as to better understand the existence of a real, if limited, plurality and dissent, and the possibility of change. Although the PM is concerned with media performance, it could be expanded by looking at the effects and reception of audiences. For instance, the cumulative and overarching impact on the attitudes and behaviors of media consumers can be studied in the framework of cultivation theory (Gerbner et al., 1986). In the line of the Glasgow Media Groups (Berry & Philo, 2004), the effects on perception of specific topics may be studied by comparing media representations (content analysis) with the representations expressed by different types of audiences in focus groups, interviews, and questionnaires. Finally, the model's explanatory capacity may also be enhanced with the reflections of critical cultural studies with regard to the performance of audiences and popular culture (see Babe, 2009; Martín-Barbero, 1993). Although different approaches allow for insightful research, it should be noted that any study aiming to test the *manufacture of consent* by the media should also take into account other cultural and material sources of consent (see Cohen & Rogers, 1994), thus making it difficult to assign a specific influence to media content.

As Chomsky and Herman (1988) have pointed out, the model does not attempt to explain everything, but simply to provide a general framework for understanding and analyzing the media, one which needs to be expanded or adjusted for each individual case. A model is a representation of one part of reality, and therefore necessarily has to be a simplification. Like other nomothetic models, the PM does not cover all the aspects of the process, but comprises a few elements that, according to the authors, are those that have a greater influence on news production. That is, it identifies five causal variables to explain certain general patterns of cause and effect. It might best be understood as a probabilistic model which, in light of the various studies available, has a high rate of accuracy, although this will vary according to the interests of the elite, the local contexts, and other specific conditions.

As indicated in the discussion of Part I, the five filters, to a large extent, determine news production, and I believe they should therefore be considered *primary* elements of the model, elements which may, in turn, encompass other important factors and processes that need to be explored further to better understand how news is produced.

At the same time, as some authors have suggested, it is necessary to first consider the scope of the PM's applicability to the media of countries other than the United States (where Herman and Chomsky focused their analysis), to Internet media, and to media products other than news (about which some references have already been made in Part I). Secondly, the possibility of adding new filters corresponding to other causal factors that determine the propaganda function of the media to a degree similar to that of the five existing filters should also be considered. These questions are addressed in the sections that follow.

2. Applicability to Other Contexts and Media Products

2.1. Applicability to Other Advanced Capitalist Countries with Liberal Democracies and Private Media Systems

The PM has been successfully empirically tested, at least in the United States (Chomsky & Herman, 1988), the UK (Robertson, 2006, 2008), Canada (Klaehn, 2005), Spain (Sierra & Vázquez, 2006), and Australia (Baker, 2007).

The filters of the PM correspond to the institutional and organizational constraints under which the media operate in liberal countries of the center, or the so-called developed countries. As Herman and Chomsky (1988) point out, there are differences between the U.S. media and the media of other countries, which generally result in a narrower range of discourse in the United States. Nevertheless, at a basic structural and organizational level, the private-corporate media in other economically developed countries operate under the restrictions imposed by the elements that comprise the PM. In the United States, as the hegemonic center of the world system where capitalism and the mechanisms of power are more developed, the influence of these filters is greater, but in other countries with similar characteristics, this influence is also evident.

It is important to bear in mind that the major player in most global conflicts and politics is the United States. The media in other countries have more freedom when dealing with this type of information, or when criticizing certain policies of the U.S. government, for example, because it is not as necessary to *convince* the public, because the interests of the governments and corporations of those countries are not as important, or because the public has a negative view of conservative U.S. governments. Nevertheless, when the interests concerned are truly important to the national and international elite, the filters intervene to a greater degree, thereby reducing the level of diversity permitted.

The existence of powerful public news services in many countries also needs to be considered. First, it should be noted that the propaganda model is not applicable to public media outlets. This does not mean that these media do not perform a propaganda function for the elite, but simply that they operate differently. Cromwell and Edwards (2006) and Doherty (2005) have shown that the epitome of all public broadcasting services, the British Broadcasting Corporation, is constrained by a set of filters similar to those proposed by the PM, which put it at the service of the legitimation of the elite. Second, it is important to highlight that, while public media outlets have a greater pluralistic and democratic tradition, and although some may enjoy large audiences, most of the media spectrum is occupied by private media groups, which means that the PM is just as valid as a general framework for understanding the predominant media systems in these countries.

The development and strength of these filters is not as great in regions such as Europe, but their effect is nevertheless visible in news content. As Sparks (2007) has pointed out, there are a number of specific factors, such as a more open cultural and ideological context and journalistic culture, strong critical currents, the presence of leftist political parties with representation in government, and greater competition in the newspaper markets, which permit a wider range of news content. In general, there is greater diversity in countries with a tradition of social democracy than that found in the United States, but since the worldwide ideological offensive in favor of the "free market" and media concentration and conglomeration, a significant liberal bias (in the European sense of the term, i.e., in favor of economic "free market" liberalism/neo-liberalism) has taken root in the media (see Chomsky & Herman, 2002). In

Spain, as Navarro (2007) shows, the dominance of liberal thought is patent, even in traditionally social democratic media outlets such as *El País*.

In some countries there is a wider variety of outlets, but as explained earlier, the concentration of media ownership is a global phenomenon, with strong connections between the media, political, and economic elite of the center and the periphery. Most media outlets in these countries also rely on advertising to survive, habitually turn to official sources for information, are prone to countermeasures imposed by those in power, and work within the parameters of the dominant ideology.

Therefore, although the PM was designed to explain the U.S. media, it can also prove useful for the analysis of the media in other countries where the U.S. model is being gradually adopted. According to an international study, "in most parts of the world, the news media are becoming more market-oriented and entertainment-centred" as a consequence of "three trends that have gathered pace since the 1980s: the multiplication of privately owned television channels, the weakening of programme requirements on commercial broadcasters ('de-regulation'), and a contraction in the audience size and influence of public broadcasters" (Curran, Iyengar, Brink Lund, & Salovaara-Moring, 2009, p. 2). This predominant model, which the authors refer to as the market model, was compared with the public service model of the Scandinavian countries. It was found that

[P]ublic service television devotes more attention to public affairs and international news, and fosters greater knowledge in these areas, than the market model. Public service television also gives greater prominence to news, encourages higher levels of news consumption, and contributes to a smaller within-nation knowledge gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged. (ibid., p. 1)

As Herman and McChesney (1997) have studied, a small group of transnational corporations have gained control over most of the international flows of information and entertainment with the assistance of Western governments (especially that of the United States). This has led to the implantation of an advertising-based commercial model which aims to promote the globalization of the capitalist market according to the interests of the media owners and the advertisers. Profit-driven media companies establish alliances between themselves and with other noncommunication corporations in order to penetrate new markets and sell their products. These products transmit a social model based on the alleged virtues of consumerism, commercialism, corporations, and the market, while they disregard the models that challenge this view. The market logic and corporate view thus dominates most of the international media spectrum to the detriment of public service, diversity, and citizenry. According to the authors, the Western-dominated communication system began in the mid-19th century with the creation of wire services. The United States and transnational corporations gained hegemony during the post-war era. In the following decades, the globalization of communication was developed according to a dominance-dependency model based on the power of central countries over the periphery. In the 1970s, this unidirectional model of information flow was strongly questioned by periphery countries and UNESCO, which tried to foster a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). The initiative did not succeed, and although resistance has continued to exist, a private-commercial international media system

has continued to expand until today (for a similar account of the globalization of communication, see Mattelart, 1996).

It can thus be concluded that the filtration process also occurs in other countries with mostly private/corporate media, although the filters may not be as fully developed as they are in the United States, and the political, cultural, and ideological environment may be somewhat more open (depending on the country). This confirms the consistency of the PM, as it demonstrates that there is a causal relationship between a weaker system of filters and a rather more open and varied spectrum of opinion. In the few countries (Scandinavia) where the predominant model is a public service media system that is less exposed to market forces, media content is aimed at fulfilling a more positive social role. All of this suggests that the PM will be applicable to other advanced capitalist democracies, given the similar institutional arrangements. However, it is important to note that there is still a need for further empirical evidence to demonstrate this.

2.2. The PM and the Internet

With the rise of the Internet, it is reasonable to question whether the PM can be used to explain its content and operation. The literature on the Internet is extensive, and there are many important issues to debate, but to answer this question there are just two dimensions to consider.

First, the characteristics of the Internet constitute a media model quite different from that of radio, newspapers, or television. Indeed, the Internet is the platform on which non-corporate, participatory media outlets with critical perspectives and support for social change have been able to develop and grow. In this respect, there are different dynamics intrinsic to the way the Internet operates that the PM does not consider. Although the Internet may allow considerable freedom, it must be understood as a medium that has to be fought for, in a context in which the political and economic powers seek to appropriate control of it and use it to further their own interests. Several authors (Chomsky & Herman, 2002; Longford & Patten, 2007; Morozov, 2011; Papacharissi, 2002; Poster, 1997) have provided evidence that, while the Internet is used for the empowerment of grassroots and protest movements, it is also increasingly being shaped and controlled by corporations, and used by political parties, reactionary forces, and even criminal groups for social control. The Internet is an extraordinary tool for targetting consumers, for personal and group data collection, for political persuasion, for control and censorship of dissidence, and for cultural distraction.

Different sectors of the elite are taking steps to regulate and control the Internet. After the riots in Greece and England, the respective governments announced that they may need to resort to censorship, and may harden the legislation on the Internet. David Cameron brought up the possibility of banning people who may be plotting to riot from using social networks and urged Facebook and Twitter to remove content that could incite revolts. In Spain, Madrid's city council vetoed the websites of the 15-M movement from the municipal libraries due to "content policies." Wikileaks has also been object of several governmental and corporate attacks. For example, its system to receive donations was blocked by the online payment service provider PayPal as a consequence of a U.S. government campaign. Other attacks

on Internet free speech can be seen in the persecution of peer-to-peer exchange and opposition to net neutrality.

In the United States, the hacktivist group Anonymous revealed that military contractors used fake Facebook identities for the purpose of hacking progressive organizations. The U.S. military is also developing software to manipulate the social media by using fake identities. One project is being carried out by the Central Command (Centcom) and the U.S. corporation Ntrepid with the objective of influencing online conversations and spreading pro-American propaganda abroad. Another U.S. project is Cyber Command, which, according to the U.S. Department of Defense Office of Public Affairs (2010),

plans, coordinates, integrates, synchronizes and conducts activities to: direct the operations and defense of specified Department of Defense information networks and; prepare to, and when directed, conduct full spectrum military cyberspace operations in order to enable actions in all domains, ensure US/Allied freedom of action in cyberspace and deny the same to our adversaries. (Mission Statement, para. 4)

Burghardt (2010) has compiled information from different publicly available sources that shows that the FBI and other government agencies, with the collaboration of private companies, have been wiretapping Internet users and collecting personal data. Programs are also being developed for surveillance of labor. For example, according to its website, Spector 360

is the most advanced employee monitoring and filtering tool available on the market today, designed to provide businesses with a high-level view of all their employees' PC and Internet activity and allow full control of what web sites your employees can access. (Spector 360, n.d., para. 1) .

Moreover, Internet surfers usually turn to established, rather than alternative sources. For example, a survey conducted by Pew Research Center (2003) found that, when looking for information and opinions about the war in Iraq, around 90% of the respondents did not visit alternative, non-traditional news websites, while only 8% did so. The battle between different forces will ultimately determine whether, in the future, the Internet is to be a free, socially controlled medium, or a system controlled by the elite. It is possible that, in the future, the traditional mass media will cease to be the predominant form of communication, but the orientation of the emerging model is still to be developed in the context of power relations. As has occurred with other technologies, the intrinsically free nature of the Internet could be stripped away if it is not successfully brought under popular control.

Second, as the advent of the Internet has done little to change the type of information presented by corporate mainstream media, the PM continues to be perfectly valid for the description of online mainstream news production. In the online editions of *The Guardian*, *El País*, or *The New York Times*, there is space for new sections, profiles of people and countries, reports, etc., which occasionally allow for a little more context, but their news production continues to be restricted to the acceptable ideas. Online corporate mass media production is thus equally explicable by the PM.

2.3. Applicability to Other Media Products

Herman and Chomsky's model was developed as an analytical framework to explain mass media news production in the United States. However, as the variables it identifies relate to some of the more distinctive features of the media system, it would be reasonable to expect to find similar filtration processes in the production of other media products. This is what can be inferred from Herman's answer to Jeffery Klaehn's question about whether the PM is applicable to other products, such as films or comics:

It can probably be applied as well to other media forms, modified as necessary by the extent to which they deal in matters of strong elite interest, the importance of advertising, and their ownership. A great many of the more important institutions in the categories that you name are parts of media conglomerates, and operate under similar pressures and rules. There may be special features of these media and local conditions that will modify the applicability of the propaganda model. But there is no logical reason why they shouldn't be subject to the same general principles and be worthy of study along these lines. (Herman, in Klaehn, 2008, para. 20)

There is no doubt that other media products, such as entertainment programs, music, movies, video games, or children's comics could be analyzed using the five filters of the propaganda model. For example, Alford (2009) has shown that the PM's five filters and its central hypothesis are applicable to the Hollywood entertainment industry. However, different cultural industries have specific features that require individual analysis for each type of product. For example, these analyses might show that, when applying the five-filter analysis to a product aimed at a minority audience whose payment for that product already makes it a profitable investment, the filters would be found to be less effective, and the final product would therefore possess different characteristics. From this perspective, the propaganda model may be considered a useful guide for undertaking research of different media products, though it must be broadened and modified in accordance with the specific qualities of each one. At the same time, it should be noted that, being a representation of what happens at the level of reality (i.e., a model), the PM will represent the conditioning elements of some media products more accurately and validly than others. The more similar the mode of operation of a cultural industry is to traditional journalism, the more valid the model will be for it. For cultural industries in which phenomena such as conglomeration do not occur, or which are not financed by advertising, the model would need to be modified substantially.

There is a need for empirical inquiry. The applicability of the filters to different media products is an area ripe for investigation, though any investigation does need to be complemented with an analysis of the representations the products offer. An important cultural industry which needs to be analysed is the lucrative video game industry. It could be studied from the perspective of the identities and social roles it contains, the relations that take place between the different actors, the objectives that are to be followed, the range of possible actions to be undertaken, the values that are transmitted, or its entertainment model as compared to other possible models. In addition, the use of video games for product placements, PR strategies, and military propaganda are topics which require further observation. Other cultural products, like music, books, comedies, theater, movies, or comics could be studied along the same lines.

3. Proposals for Expansion and Modification of the Model

Most of the criticisms and observations aimed at refining the PM suggest that there is a need for the model to consider other factors influencing media performance. Some authors have focused on factors that further promote the propaganda role of the media system. For example, it has been pointed out that the PM eschews the direct or purchased influence of the elite (intentionality), due to the model's structural and non-conspiratorial focus (Boyd-Barret, 2004). In the context of the PM, intentionality is a factor that may be understood as a sub-dimension of the sourcing filter, which helps to further explain the asymmetrical relation between elite sources and journalists. On the other hand, there are other factors which, according to several authors, would contravene the PM, or at least would allow for more contradiction and less uniformity in the media than what the PM posits. Journalistic professional standards, the roles played by journalists and audiences, and technological capabilities are some of the factors that have been raised in order to show that the media system is contested terrain open to variety and change. When situated in the context of power relations, these elements appear as more dependent than dominant. This means that they can be understood in the context of the constraints exerted by the filters. The possibility of democratically influencing the media is acknowledged, but these elements by themselves are insufficient to provoke a substantial change in media performance. According to Herman (in Klaehn, 2008), any reforms that do not alter the structure of the media system would not greatly affect the activity and function of the media. Moreover, Herman further holds that "we cannot move to a truly democratic and plural media scene without a radical change in the political economy, which is to say, some kind of economic and political revolution" (in Mullen, 2009, p. 21). Following this line of thought, perhaps the PM should take into more account the social action of non-elite groups in a historical perspective as a component which affects and helps to explain the hegemony of the current mass media model, and which holds the possibility of subverting it in a process of broader social transformation. Although attention should be paid to power asymmetries, the possibility of change by the oppressed would be acknowledged by considering the mutual influences between the mass media system and the actors of the social system.

3.1. Journalistic Professionalism

According to liberal approaches to media performance, **journalistic professionalism** allows for autonomy and contestation in the media. Authors like Hallin (1994) and Lang and Lang (2004a, 2004b) have argued that the PM neglects professionalism, and therefore, overlooks a central factor in understanding how the media works, which acts against the constraints and hypotheses posited by the model. Herman has responded that professionalism rules "are not likely to override the claims and demands of deeper power and control relationships" (2000, p. 106); on the contrary, they have made "journalists oblivious to the compromises with authority they are constantly making" (ibid.). Herman quotes Hallin himself, who acknowledges that "professional journalism can allow something close to complete government control through domination of sources" (ibid.). According to Herman:

if those professional standards were sufficiently powerful and relevant the Propaganda Model would soon be shown to be false – and the media would not go along with staged elections in a terrorized El Salvador, a highly questionable claim of the Bulgarian-KGB

involvement in the 1981 shooting of the Pope, and the Bush-era claim of the menace of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, among other blatant cases of propaganda service. (in Mullen, 2009, p. 18)

Moreover, an interesting point for debate and analysis is Boyd-Barret's (2004) suggestion to consider the possibility of encompassing the dependence on official sources within a more general filter of journalist routines that could be categorized under journalistic professionalism. My view is that journalistic professionalism is an important element to be analyzed in the habitually uncritical acceptance of official sources, but that it is not the main element, as the need for low costs and the interconnections with the other branches of power are two more central factors. It can be analyzed as a sub-category of each of the other filters (particularly within the sourcing of news), as I believe Herman and Chomsky view it, or as a "secondary" filter of lesser importance that exists under the constraints of the other filters. From this point of view, journalistic professionalism constitutes an interesting topic for further study as an element that contributes to the acceptance of the elite view under the mask of neutrality and professionalism.

Political economists have noted that the notion of professionalism arose in the mid-19th century, when the press went from being a partisan and political concern to a business increasingly concentrated in the hands of the very rich, in order to avoid the appearance of serving the interests of the owners and advertisers (McChesney, 2008, pp. 26–30). Due to the influence described in the first two filters of the PM, the journalists' mantra since then has been the objectivity and independence of their profession.

This professionalism, promoted by the proprietors, grants the journalists relative autonomy, which is consistent with the suppositions of Herman and Chomsky's model. But there are also three strong biases that form part of the journalists' code of professionalism (McChesney, 2008, pp. 26–38) which are also consistent with the model: First, official sources are considered the legitimate sources for news production; second, professional journalism tends to avoid contextualization; and third, instead of being politically neutral and *objective*, the media transmit positive values to serve the commercial objectives of the owners and sponsors, as well as the political objectives of the elite.

The code of professionalism contributes to the journalists' view of official sources as legitimate—indeed, as the first that should be given attention—as they hold positions of responsibility and authority and, in the case of U.S. governments, have been democratically elected. However, there is a deeper structural need for the existence of this view, regardless of the code, particularly given the effect of the first two filters. The acceptance of these sources is also explained by the fear of reactions from elite institutions that forms part of the fourth filter (flak), and by the ideology and values in which the journalists tend to be socialized, which would correspond to the fifth filter (dominant ideology).

Professionalism also explains why, under the imperative of objectivity, it is difficult to be able to contextualize the information and provide a complete picture of the situation. Furthermore, as McChesney points out:

The way to assure that news selection not be perceived as ideologically driven is to have a news hook or news peg to justify a news story. If something happens, it is news. This

meant that crucial social issues like racism or environmental degradation fell through the cracks of journalism unless there was some event . . . to justify coverage, or unless official sources wanted to make it a story. (2008, p. 33)

But once again, these characteristics of the media can also be explained by the effect derived from the components of the PM: space constraints on news stories due to business imperatives, time constraints to investigate stories, fear of upsetting the agents of power, etc.

The criterion of objectivity also leads journalists to present *both sides of a story*; that is, the views of two different segments of the elite involved in the issue. The first problem arises from the lack of representation of alternative sources. However, it is also true that, as the code of professionalism requires journalists to hide their own values and opinions, the media are dedicated to simply presenting these points of view and not evaluating them or explaining the implications of each one, or determining who is telling the truth and who is lying. In cases where the elite are united, their perspective ends up being imposed in the absence of critical evaluation and alternative sources.

In any case, strict compliance with the criterion of *objectivity* is impossible. The values and ideology of journalists and editors must necessarily affect the selection and preparation of the news. Journalists and editors tend to share the corporate and brand values of their company, as well as other values in keeping with the views of the elite which have been internalized through having to work under the restrictions of the filters. Although it is not automatic and there are exceptions, this framework of values and priorities generally leads professional journalism to convey the range of opinions of the elite without questioning them. But these values are more closely related to the requirements of working for a major corporate media outlet and the socialization process that must be undergone to be able to move up in the company. The need to follow the code of professionalism is essentially related to the business dimension and concentration of ownership of private media companies, as these were the reasons for inventing the code.

It is my belief that the phenomenon of professionalism needs to be analyzed in the context of all five filters, as it is a product of them. This analysis should give particular attention to the third filter, *sourcing of news*, in order to explain certain factors that influence the behavior of journalists in their reliance and acceptance of official sources. It should thus be considered a kind of sub-filter of the third filter, or as a secondary filter that can serve for further exploration of other aspects of media performance, as it needs to be understood as an axiological, normative, and behavioral code of adaptation to the restrictions of the filters. This can also be seen in the fact that, in some regions, although journalistic professionalism is not as firmly established as it is in English-speaking countries, the problems arising from structural obstacles, such as dependence on official sources, are also evident.

3.2. The Role of Journalists

Similarly, the PM has been criticized for underestimating the **role of journalists** (see Herman, 1996, 2000). Indeed, journalists may try to observe alternative/autonomous journalistic standards and

attempt to promote a different type of content. They may even be considered as potential class allies in class struggle, as Sparks (2007) holds. As for the PM, Herman and Chomsky maintain that “the humanity and professional integrity of journalists” (2002, p. 34) is a factor that comes into conflict with the function of the media assigned by the PM. This suggests that the PM may be enriched by focusing more specifically on the role and attitudes of journalists and other media employees, especially given that some authors (McKercher & Mosco, 2008) have identified an upsurge in the resistance of workers worldwide in the cultural, communications, telecommunications, and IT sectors.

However, as McKercher & Mosco (*ibid.*) hold, the active role of communication labor, such as that played by journalists, needs to be understood within the larger political-economic structures—that is, within a consistent and relatively fixed framework that limits, punishes, rewards, and encourages particular types of behavior. As Gans (2003) argues, journalists find themselves in a situation of “disempowerment,” precisely due to the corporate and commercial imperatives of the industry. The humanity of journalists is evident in some content, as much when they break with the official line as when they consciously convey propaganda. A certain amount of journalistic autonomy does exist, and some journalists even dare to challenge the edicts of the filters, but the reality is that the predominant corporate organizational structure forces journalists to work under very severe restrictions that do not allow the media to be structurally free or operate outside the interests of the elite. Journalists may adopt different attitudes that will have different effects on them as determined by the political economy of the media, but a result of these effects is that journalists generally tend to be socialized with certain values that will enable them to work and move up in their profession, or that they will tend not to show their own values if they are different. Moreover, according to Herman, “what journalists do, what they see as newsworthy, and what they take for granted as premises of their work are frequently well explained by the incentives, pressures, and constraints incorporated into such a structural analysis” (Chomsky & Herman, 2002, p. xi).

There are undoubtedly certain processes of negotiation and conflict that mean employers are not always able to impose their will. However, journalists can do little in terms of the editorial line, concentration of resources, or troubling cutbacks to newspaper staff, and even less if the media outlet has a mandate to sensationalize and trivialize news content. For example, journalists are powerless in the face of the current corporate trend toward reducing budgets for international news, with the consequence that almost three-quarters of U.S. newspapers have cut back the space devoted to international news stories (Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2008). According to the annual Tyndall Report (2008), ABC, CBS, and NBC had given the lowest coverage to international politics in 21 years. Due to budget cuts and the policy for the allocation of funds, of the 244 minutes that the networks dedicated to the war effort in Iraq, only 88 were broadcast directly from Iraq itself. The business decisions mentioned above have a noticeable impact on content, and it is unlikely that journalists would be able to challenge them.

It is also important to note that media proprietors, who occupy the highest position in the organizational hierarchy, hire managers and editors who share their business vision and worldview. A company’s top executives will always delegate to people they can trust to pursue the economic and social objectives of the media outlet, and these people will, in turn, delegate to employees who have been hired

to fill the lower ranks of the hierarchy, and who need to understand what is expected of them. Although there is room for debate and professional autonomy, the hierarchical corporate organization of the media promotes a business structure in which decisions are made from the top down. It is the organizational and institutional structure itself that creates conditions where, with no need for direct pressure, all employees understand the roles they must perform for the company (i.e., for the proprietors and shareholders) if they want to move up. According to a study conducted by the Columbia Journalism Review and the Pew Research Center (2000), of 287 U.S. journalists and editors surveyed, 41% said they had avoided publishing news or had softened stories to benefit the interests of their media group. Nevertheless, in the face of the desire for freedom of expression of many professional journalists, media owners also sometimes resort to direct intervention in an effort to reduce their autonomy. A NewsWatch study found that almost 52% of journalists surveyed identified direct pressure from media owners as a factor that "often" or "occasionally" has the effect of "filtering the news," while 45% said that fear of reprisal by owners "occasionally" or "often" leads them to engage in self-censorship (Model, 2003, p. 135).

In conclusion, the role played by journalists is a factor that is heavily influenced and molded by larger structural forces. This conclusion is corroborated when analyzing non-corporate media, whose content, whether written by professional or non-professional journalists, is very different from that of the mainstream, because its authors are not subject to the same restrictions. The role that journalists play in news production can only be clearly understood by taking into account the general context within which they operate. It would, therefore, be interesting to incorporate this praxiological dimension related to the role of journalists as a secondary filter of the PM.

3.3. The Audience

The role and importance of the audience is one of the most important points of debate between cultural studies and political economy of communication. In opposition to structural approaches that focus on how class interests are at the center of the media phenomenon, postmodern cultural studies place emphasis on the power of the recipient. In spite of the apparent impossibility of dialogue between both schools, many political economists have noted that the study of audiences is integral to this approach. For example, according to Mosco (1996, p. 25), political economy is interested in studying the power relations that constitute and exert control on the production, distribution, and consumption of communication. With regard to the PM, political economist Sparks (2007) points out that **the need to reach specific audiences**, which, in many cases, are members of the working class, is an important factor that media companies take into consideration when producing content. The news is, to put it simply, a product that must be sold, one which, in principle, audiences must find appealing and more or less believable. It is therefore clear that the first two filters of the PM, which are closely interrelated, can serve as a framework for studying the audience; media content requires an audience to justify an investment by the advertisers on whom the profitability of the media depends.

The audience thus constitutes a sub-category or sub-filter of the propaganda model that requires further exploration. As there are differences between media outlets with mass audiences and media outlets aimed at the wealthier sectors of society, the effect of the audience needs to be examined in each case. The role played by audiences has a significant influence at various levels, but it is necessary to

consider this role in its appropriate power context. The media have to offer an appealing product, but they must do so within the parameters determined by the desire to avoid challenging the establishment, the eagerness to please advertisers, the capital available, the dependence on official sources, etc. In other words, the media develop products that are subjected to the filtration system described by the PM, with the fact that the audience must be maintained or expanded being just one of the elements to be considered. However, the overall effect of the filters is the imposition of restrictions on what can and cannot be offered, regardless of what may interest the audience. While the elite are able to influence the media, the audience doesn't have adequate or effective mechanisms to make requests or demands. The audience generally chooses between the products that the media decide to offer (Chomsky & Herman, 2002).

Indeed, it is not unusual for widely popular outlets or programs to fall victim to corporate and political pressure for attacking the individual, ideological, or class interests of the elite. Such was the case of the Academy Award®-winning documentary *Taxi to the Dark Side*, which was not broadcast on Discovery Channel as scheduled because "the film's controversial content might damage Discovery's public offering" (*Democracy Now!*, 2008). Another similar example is the cancellation of the successful Spanish program *Caiga quien Caiga*, which was highly critical of the Aznar government, after the expansion of Silvio Berlusconi's empire at the end of 2002 (Labio, 2006, pp. 47, 113). Yet another is the difficulty faced by progressive radio programs in the United States to stay on the air despite their high ratings (Kimberley, 2000). It is also not unusual for commentators with a high number of readers around the world, such as Herman and Chomsky themselves, to be regularly ostracized from the media. As always, particular factors can affect the level of audience influence.

What these limitations on audience influence indicate is that the balance of power is tilted considerably in favor of the elite. As Chomsky (2002) has often pointed out, surveys in the United States demonstrate that, on most major issues, there is a clear difference between elite opinion and that of the general public, while the media clearly falls on the side of the former. Basing his finding on various studies, Gans suggests that audiences are dissatisfied with news content because of "inaccuracy, insufficient attention to audience concerns, or bias toward one or another political group or socioeconomic stratum" (2003, p. 33). He adds that, "if the polls are right, citizens feel that the news media are as unresponsive to them as is government" (*ibid.*, p. 34). In spite of this, the behavior of the media remains unchanged, a fact that lays bare its far from democratic character and the limited influence of the audience.

3.4. Technology

Technology has been studied from many perspectives, but it has not been commonly raised as a factor to be considered by the PM. However, Vanderlinder (2006) has proposed technology as the sixth filter, based on an analysis of the role it plays in shaping content from the perspective of political economy and critical theory. As his analysis shows, the technologies of each generation and each medium have affected the nature and character of the news: The technology of the medium imposes various limitations and constraints on the production and dissemination of news, influences the number of possible recipients, serves to create time-space reconfigurations, affects style, and leaves its mark on the culture of

journalistic practice. The fact that technology both facilitates and limits expressive and informational possibilities needs to be acknowledged. On the other hand, axioms like McLuhan's (1964) *the medium is the message* are too determinist, since representations offered by the same medium may vary according to the objective of the mediators. The message may be better identified with the code; that is, the way in which the world is represented is according to what a given society permits (Martín Serrano, 2008, p. 150). For the purposes of the article's discussion, technology is considered a secondary filter. This label is based on the idea that the most important factor is not the specific use that each technology allows, but whether its general purpose is to promote social justice and human freedom, or, as has generally been the case (although with some exceptions), for social control. This depends on who controls each technology and how it is used. Technology and the filters of the PM condition media production at different levels. The main use made of technology depends on the social, political, and economic context in which it is developed, although it may also serve to change that context.

Technological revolutions have always opened up possibilities for the transmission of information, something that has been well understood by many social movements that have fought for control over the technologies of their time to put them to the service of social change. But these technologies have generally been controlled by the highest social classes. All battles for the technologies still in use, such as radio or television, have been won by the elite, and their democratizing potential has been eroded by commercialization and corporate concentration. Political-economic factors and those related to ownership and access, which are gradually established over time, are the things that determine whether new technologies will bring about a fundamental transformation in the world of communication, or merely be used to promote social reproduction. Although the study of alternative uses for technology and the way that these affect the characteristics of media content may be extremely important, when analyzing which interests are served by the mass media, technology should be considered a secondary filter of the model, operating within the context of the original filters.

3.5. Direct or Purchased Influence of the Elite

The PM focuses on structural and institutional features that affect the media without any need for intentionality or conspiracies. Although the authors do focus on corporate PR, this non-conspirational focus has made Miller (in Mullen, 2007) question the fact that the PM dismisses the role of the public relations and organized propaganda industries. On the same line of thought, Boyd-Barrett proposes a sixth filter consisting of "the direct purchase of media influence by powerful sources, or the 'buying out' of individual journalists or their media by government agencies and authorities" (2004, p. 436). As both authors demonstrate, this factor is clearly decisive in the transmission of increasingly sophisticated and effective propaganda. For example, Boyd-Barrett (ibid.) offers evidence of wide-scale, covert CIA penetration of media. He refers to the mid-1970s Senate and House investigations of the CIA, which exposed extensive covert penetration of the media. The author also refers to Carl Bernstein's revelation that over 400 U.S. journalists over 25 years had been employed by the CIA. In the 1980s, the Reagan administration established an illegal CIA-administered domestic propaganda campaign to influence reporters in support of covert operations in Central America. Barret also offers evidence that media penetration continued into the 1990s. Finally, the author studies the case of *The New York Times* and its correspondent Judith Miller's pro-war reporting of the build-up toward the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. He shows how the U.S.

government engaged in official practices of misinformation aimed at the manipulation of public opinion, and how *The Times* and Miller acted as conduit for stories originating in U.S. military and intelligence agencies, while dissenting views were marginalized. Barret also comments on the practice of embedding journalists as another way of buying out journalists by offering protection in exchange for reporting the official version.

Herman and Chomsky analyze this element in the section on news sourcing in their book *Manufacturing Consent*, and I believe that it is within this filter that the direct influence of corporations and governments on information should be situated. News sourcing refers to the relationship between the providers of information and the mass media, and it allows an analysis on two levels: how the sources operate and are organized, and how the media receives their information.

4. Conclusions

It has been noted that the influence of the propaganda model's five original filters in media operations is increasing in advanced capitalist countries with predominantly private media systems. The PM is also a valid model for explaining the news production of the private mainstream mass media on the Internet, and it is a useful guide for studying media products other than news. The five broad categories that comprise the original model serve as a general framework in which to incorporate other factors that likewise filter information, such as journalistic professionalism, the role of journalists, the role of the audience, technology, and the direct influence of the elite. These may, therefore, be understood as sub-categories of the existing filters, or as secondary filters to be considered together with the five original primary elements, depending on the case.

Like other models, the PM has its limitations, as it does not cover all the dimensions of the media that could be studied. For example, it cannot be used to measure the effects on recipients of media products; of course, this is something that it was never intended for. The validity of the model should be evaluated according to its intended purpose, while other observable and measurable factors and phenomena unrelated to that purpose merely demonstrate that it is impossible for the model, as a theoretical abstraction of one facet of the reality of the media, to account for the entire phenomenon. The PM is not all-encompassing, but it has no serious limitations in explaining and predicting media content, particularly news content, and therefore, it constitutes a basically valid framework for studying and understanding the behavior of the mass media, combinable with other models that focus on other dimensions.

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