

Media 1 - Noam Chomsky

Is 'HOW' the story is told as important 'WHAT' story you're told?

Key Concepts: "Manufacturing Consent" (1988) ('The 5 Filters'), Media Ownership, Role of Advertising, Power of those who Work in the Media, Consumer targeting strategies, Origin of Content, Reach and Influence of the Media.

"It is our view that, among their other functions, the media serve, and propagandize on behalf of, the powerful societal interests that control and finance them." Introduction, 'Manufacturing Consent' Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky (1988)

This leads to 'editorial self-censorship', but without 'overt coercion' in 5 ways, the '**Five Filters of Editorial Bias**'

1. Media Ownership:

Mass media firms are big corporations. Often, they are part of even bigger conglomerates. Their goal is **Profit**. And so it's in their interests to push for whatever guarantees that profit and guarantees their 'market share'. Therefore, critical (investigative) journalism must take second place to the needs and interests of the corporation.

2. Advertising:

Media costs a lot more than consumers will ever pay. So who fills the gap? Advertising revenue. And what are the advertisers paying for? Audiences. And so it isn't so much that the media are selling you a product — their output. They are **also** selling advertisers a product — YOU." Do you think, in that context, that media organization will be critical of their own advertisers?

3. The Media Elite:

Journalism cannot be a check on power because the very system they work within encourages **complicity**. Governments, corporations, big institutions know how to play the media game. They know how to "**influence the narrative**". They feed/leak media scoops, official accounts, interviews with the 'experts'. They make themselves crucial to the process of journalism. So, those in power and those who report on them are "in bed with each other".

4. Flak:

If you want to challenge power, you'll be pushed to the margins and denied access to the leaks that the 'elite' (no. 3) control. When the media — journalists, whistle-blowers, sources — stray away from the consensus, they get 'flak'. When the story is inconvenient for the powers that be, you'll see the flak machine in action **discrediting sources, trashing stories** and diverting the conversation. They'll do anything to get you to look in the other direction...

5. The Common Enemy

To manufacture consent, you need an enemy — a target. That common enemy is the fifth filter. Communism, Terrorists, Immigrants, Muslims, Travellers, European Bureaucrats... Anyone will do! A common enemy, a bogeyman to fear, helps corral public opinion. While this is directly relevant to media, it overlaps with 'identity' also, particularly Edward Said's "Covering Islam". What examples of a 'common enemy' can you identify in the media today?

But wait, we don't have a 'Key Thinker' who is a 'media theorist'!?!? — Yes, I know, but you are allowed (in fact encouraged) to engage with thinkers outside your course. Later, you'll see how some of our other thinkers engage with aspects of the media. But **NOAM CHOMSKY** is an excellent way of giving yourself a framework through which to think about these issues... He's a KT next year!

Using the 'Five Filters' consider what impact these 'self-censorship' issues might have on the following people:

A 'Regular Joe/Jane' News Consumers: _____

A Rookie Newspaper Reporter: _____

A 'Cable' TV News Anchor: _____

A Newspaper Editor: _____

A Media Corporation owner/shareholder: _____

A Corrupt Politician: _____

A Media 'Spin Doctor': _____

Do you think that these pressures would be greater (or less) in the age of 'Social Media'? In particular, consider 'Clickbait' and the impact that this might have upon news reporting.

Thinker's Background

- Chomsky, born in 1928, is an American linguist, philosopher, cognitive scientist, historian, political activist, and social critic. Sometimes called "the father of modern linguistics"
- He is best known as a professor in the prestigious M.I.T. (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) where he was a professor of Linguistics for more than 50 years!
- He was famously opposed to the Vietnam War and spoke and published frequently about it, particularly in his amazing essay "The Responsibility of Intellectuals" where he lays out some of the ideas that would later go on to be a part of "Manufacturing Consent"
<https://chomsky.info/19670223/>
- He identifies politically as a "Libertarian Socialist". How does that fit in with other key thinkers?
- Manufacturing Consent was written during the 1980s at a time when America was becoming actively more engaged in wars in Central and Latin America (such as Nicaragua)
- From the 1990s onwards, he became an even more visible political activist, particularly for the peoples of East Timor.
- After 9/11 Chomsky argued that the ensuing "War on Terror" was not a new development but a continuation of the U.S. foreign policy and concomitant rhetoric that had been pursued since at least the Reagan era
- He's still alive, and if you want to, you can find hundreds of hours of his talks and interviews on YouTube about almost every topic under the sun!

Other Sources to dig into: Lots of 'Pol-Soc' teachers are active on twitter (a medium in itself!) why not check out some of them... Some of the feeds that I've found most useful have been @NorthMonPolSoc (who made some of the 'fishbones' below), @CCCPolSoc, @PolSocStudent, or even my own feed @KHPolSoc. These have a great collection of articles, resources, and ideas. At the end of the day, it's up to you to engage actively with the media to form your own judgments...

Personal Response

There have been many films made about the operation of media in all forms from Print, TV, and Radio, right down to more modern takes on Social Media. We do, however, have to remember that these films might be considered a good way of 'Manufacturing Consent' in their own way. When you have the chance take a look at a few of the following films and jot down your responses to them, asking yourself "What would Chomsky say about this???"

1. Citizens Cain (1941)
2. All the President's Men (1976)
3. The Insider (1999)
4. Good Night and Good Luck (2005)
5. Good Morning Vietnam (1987)
6. Spotlight (2015)
7. The Post (2017)

Other notable films/Documentaries include: The Most Dangerous Man in America (2009), Page One (2011), The Truman Show (1998), State of Play (2009), The Social Network (2010), Miss Representation (2011)

Video Tip: There's one YouTube video from 'Al Jazeera' that outlines what Chomsky thinks about Manufacturing Consent. To be honest, it's really, really freaky with these orange disembodied talking mouths. If you can get past the weirdness of the video, you should be able to find it REALLY useful. 4 ½ minutes of your time well spent!
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=34LGPIXvU5M>

Links to other aspects of the course

For many other key thinkers, media is a part of what they talk about, but not the main focus of their work. In many ways, that's how you should also view this issue – having a 'healthy scepticism' about anything you read in the media, particularly asking yourself "what have they left out/what is this report NOT telling me?"

1. Edward Said – Said wrote a book called "Covering Islam" about how the Western Media covers terrorism. Consider how the media contributes to the idea of "othering"
2. Benedict Anderson – Anderson thought that the emergence of Print media, and newspapers in particular, helped to form 'National Identity'. With newspapers, we can share opinions with others in our 'imagined community' because chances are we've all read the same paper and share those opinions.
3. Sylvia Walby – "The Media" is one of the main 'Patriarchal Cultural Institutions'. Media companies owned by men portray women in a certain light and reinforce gender stereotypes. 'You can't be what you can't see. See also Laura Mulvey's 'Female Gaze'.
4. Marx (See Below)
5. See if you can identify any patterns in the way that YOU engage with the media, and whether there are ways that you can improve your own media practices???

Favourite Moment: If you really want to get your head into the weeds of some of the ways in which politicians think about the media, and get an overview of some of the historical shifts in how the media has changed with the advent of social media, there's no better place to look than Episode 11 ('The Filter') of **The Wilderness** podcast, written by Obama speechwriter Jon Favreau. <https://crooked.com/podcast/chapter-11-the-filter/>

A Suitable Starting Point?

The Hutchins Commission

The Commission on Freedom of the Press

During World War 2 many Americans were concerned about the degree to which the media, then mainly newspapers and radio, should be critical of the government. At what point did the fact that a WAR was on, mean they should be patriotic and not harm the 'war-effort'? Or should they continue to be critical of government and/or the Armed Forces in a way that might undermine morale?

At this time, many of the powerful publishers were viewed with suspicion by the American public, and criticisms of the 'Fourth Estate' focussed on the ideas that they wanted to 'monopolize' the media market, and didn't represent the interests of minorities who were not like themselves. People also worried about the 'commercialization' of the news and that business would be seen as more important than keeping the public well informed.

After WW2, Henry Luce who was the publisher of the massive "**Time**" and "**Life**" magazines wanted to enquire about the "**proper function of the media in a modern democracy**". Many of the findings of the commission inform how the media went on to develop in most modern democracies.

After 4 years of deliberations they found that:

- It was imperative (demanded) that a commitment to 'social responsibility' be imposed on the mass media
- It was in the interests of both the free media and the public for them to provide citizens with the information they needed for good government, otherwise the government would need to regulate the media
- That there should be a strengthening of the editorial and journalistic "Code of Ethics"
- The Media should consider "their moral obligation to consider the overall needs of society" that created the greatest good. In other words, they had to balance multiple (often competing) perspectives when deciding what to publish.

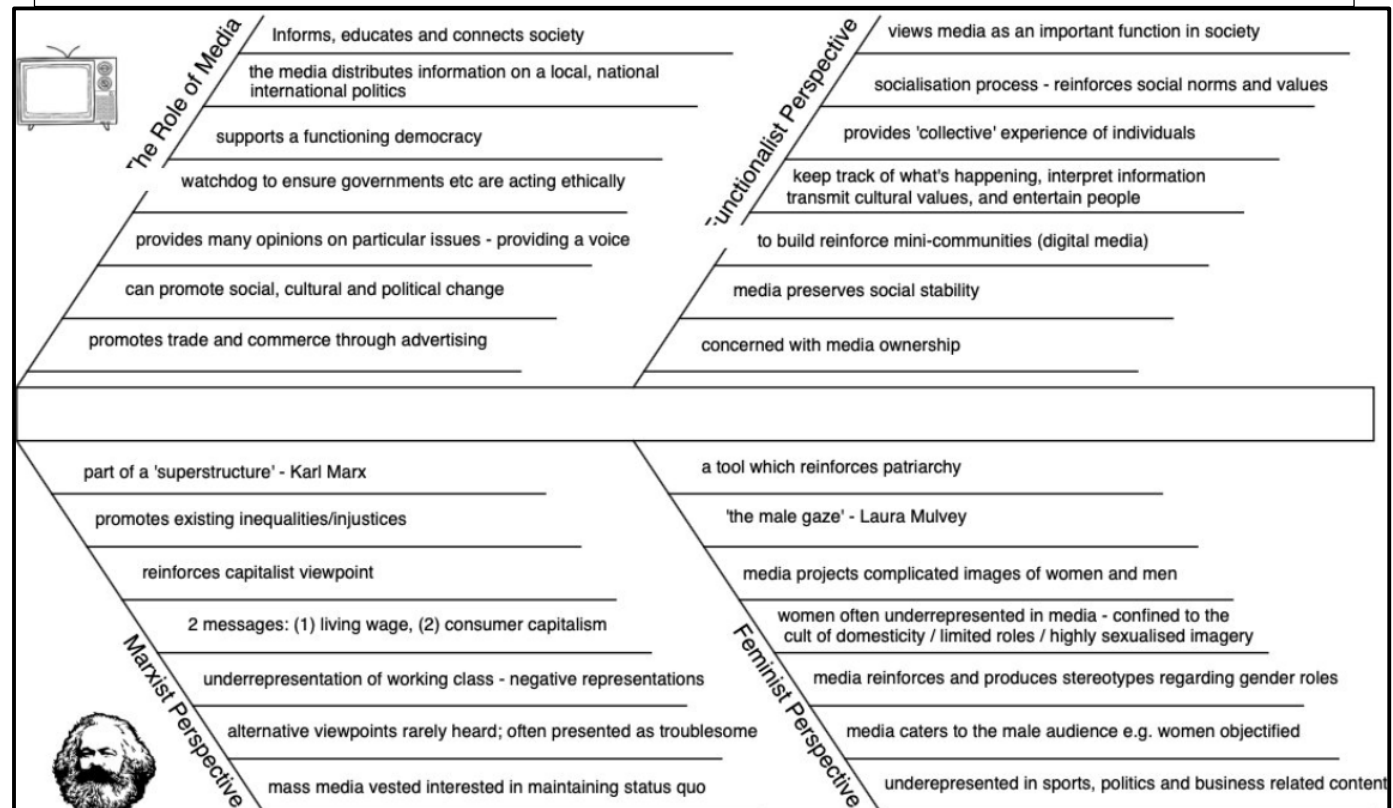
To what extent do you think that these findings still apply today, particularly considering the role of Social Media?

Key Quote: "Civilized society is a working system of ideas. It lives and changes by the consumption of ideas. Therefore, it must make sure that as many as possible of the ideas which its members have are available for its examination." Hutchins Report (1947), p 6.

Give 2-3 examples of each of the following types of media:

'Broadsheet' Newspapers _____
 'Tabloid' Newspapers _____
 'Public' TV Stations _____
 Commercial Radio _____
 Social Network Sites _____
 'Vloggers' _____
 'Podcasts' _____

Now, however, the media landscape is a lot more complex. Today, depending on who you ask, you might get very different answers as to the question "**What is the Role of the Media?**" Examine the perspectives below and consider which perspective best aligns with your view of the media?



Personal Reaction: Try and come to a firmer view of how **YOU** view the media and its responsibilities. One useful technique for ‘**synthesising**’ different perspectives is to decide how you would ‘rank’ them...

Rank the ‘Roles of the Media’ in your own order of importance	Rank 1-5
To inform: offering citizens a reliable source of information.	
To serve as a ‘watchdog’ for the people, a check against powerful institutions and individuals in society.	
To function as a forum for the public (letters to editor, social networking, blogging, microblogging, reader comments online).	
To act as a provocateur, encouraging debate & offers a dissenting view	
To help produce a sense of ‘national’ or group identity	

Different Media have particular **Characteristics** (strengths & weaknesses) in how they relate to their consumers and convey their message. Examine the table below and in the final space suggest which types of news story might be particularly suited to each type of media.

Television Reach: Large audience Audience: Targets large % of population (nationally) Accessibility: Sight, sound and motion very impactful Strengths: (1) offers wider choice (multiple channels) (2) powerful audio-visual media Weaknesses: (1) limited attention by viewers (2) high production costs	Newspapers/Print Reach: Wide reach; national, local, international, daily or weekly newspapers Audience: General Public; however in decline Accessibility: Hard to reach illiterate and poor people Strengths: (1) gives detailed coverage of news (2) at a low cost to audience Weaknesses: (1) commitment by reader; devote time (2) short life span	Internet Reach: Global; interconnectedness - netizen Audience: Targets large global population; fragmented Accessibility: Multiple languages/perspectives; audio, visual, literacy Strengths: (1) global medium (2) interactive medium Weaknesses: (1) access to wifi (2) costs associated with technology
Radio Reach: Radio can reach out to remote audiences Audience: Radio can reach out to remote audiences and mobile population not approachable by other media Accessibility: Radio can reach out to remote audiences Strengths: (1) The most cost efficient medium (2) Portability Weaknesses: (1) Lack of visual (2) fragmented audiences	Social Media Reach: Global Audience: Targets large global population Accessibility: Multiple languages; audio, visual literacy Strengths: (1) creates a community (2) level of openness Weaknesses: (1) encourages fake news / misinformation (2) time intensive	Podcasts Reach: Global Audience: Medium to large local/global audience Accessibility: Limited to hearing community Strengths: (1) provides diverse / alternative opinions (2) cost of production is low Weaknesses: (1) one dominant type of ideology may frame podcasts (2) fragmented online audience

Define the following terms: (Possible Short Questions)

‘the freedom of the press’ _____

‘the social responsibility of the press’ _____

‘the accountability of the press’ _____

THINKING MORE ABOUT THE ‘FREEDOM OF THE PRESS’

Every year (since 2002) a group called ‘Reporters Sans Frontier’ (Reporters without Borders) issue a report called the **World Press Freedom Index**. It is an important **advocacy tool** based on the principle of “emulation between states”. Because it is well known, its influence over governments is growing. Many heads of state and government fear its annual publication. The Index is a point of reference that is quoted by media throughout the world and is used by diplomats and international entities such as the UN & WB.

The WPFI ranks 180 countries and regions according to the level of freedom available to journalists. It is a snapshot of the media freedom situation based on an evaluation of **pluralism, independence** of the media, quality of **legislative framework** and **safety** of journalists in each country and region. It does **not** rank public policies even if governments obviously have a major impact on their country’s ranking. It is **not** a measure of the quality of journalism in each country or region.

Rankings: Unsurprisingly, the top ranked countries are (1) Norway, (2) Finland, (3) Sweden. The WPFI notes that the US is currently falling down the rankings at 48th (down 3 from 2018) (why?). The bottom countries include (177) China, & (179) North Korea.

Ireland falls into the top category of a ‘Good’ ranking at 15th (only 8% of countries have this description). “*The highly concentrated nature of media ownership remains the single largest threat to press freedom in Ireland. Independent News and Media (INM) controls much of the daily and Sunday newspaper market, while broadcasting is dominated by the semi-state company RTE. The 1937 constitution guarantees media freedom, but defamation suits are common... The vote by referendum in October 2018 to decriminalise blasphemy was a welcome move for press freedom.*” (WPFI Report, 2019)