

# **Noam Chomsky's Propaganda Model**

## **Introduction of Noam Chomsky**

Avram Noam Chomsky, also known as the Father of Modern Linguistics, was born in Philadelphia, on December 7, 1928. He was famous for being linguistic, cognitive scientist, philosopher, logician, historian, political activist and social critic.

He was born in a middle class family and was grown with his brother, David. During his childhood, all he experienced was that there was injustice around him. At the age of 10, he wrote an editorial on the rise of Fascism in Europe after Spanish Civil War, which later began to be the basis of his essays. At the age of 13, he moved to New York City, where he started developing his political views and concluded that people have the ability to understand economics and politics and can make their own decision. Moreover, he highlighted that the authorities should be questioned if they misuse their power or use illegitimate means to rule the state.

With the passage of time, Chomsky completed his studies and later developed enough knowledge in linguistics, presenting his writings on linguistics like "Current Issues in Linguistic Theory" in 1964 and much more. Apart from this, he entered into politics and became a social libertarian. In 1988, along with Edward S. Herman, he presented "Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass media", which became famous for the propaganda Model. Later in 2002, he also wrote an essay on "9/11: Was There an Alternative?" emphasizing on the realities on the event, US foreign policy and media control.

## **Introduction to Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of Mass Media**

Propaganda Model was a combined work of Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman in the book "Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media". The book focused on how mainstream media work and why they perform as they do. It pointed out that the media heavily

depend on elite information sources and participate in propaganda campaigns that serve their interests.

The model focused on how mass media works by carrying out **propaganda function and systematic biases along with the internal and external forces**. The propaganda model argued that there are filters through which the “raw material of news” is filtered and further shaped before it reaches the audience. Moreover, it laid emphasis on how the mass media is effective in **manipulating the minds of the public and manufacturing their consent regarding social, economic and political policies**. In this book, Chomsky and Herman kept in view the US mass media and stated that the media “are effective and powerful ideological institutions that carry out a system-supportive propaganda function, by reliance on market forces, internalized assumptions, and self-censorship, and without overt coercion” through propaganda model.

## **History of Propaganda Model**

Propaganda Model was presented in the book “Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media”, the title of which has been derived from the phrase “the manufacture of consent” used by Walter Lippmann, in his book “Public Opinion” in 1922. The former book was published in 1988 in which the authors discussed the role of Propaganda Model of Communication. They highlighted that the private media are more successful in practicing propaganda as they are merely business oriented, interested in selling products rather than the quality of news. The private media is governed by the power that is concentrated in few people or companies that tend to select the news. Moreover, the news that is delivered to the audience is determined through five classes, which are referred to as Filters.

After the publication of the book, four years later i.e. in 1992, it was taken to the cinema in the form of a documentary with the title, “Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media”. The documentary presented the model, Chomsky’s life history and the politics played by the mass media. In 2001, after 9/11 Attacks, the authors published another version of the book, updating the fifth filter. They were of the view that model is not only applicable to the US media but also to that of other countries sharing the same economic background and organizing principles, which form the basis of the biases observed in media.

## **Filters of the Propaganda Model**

Chomsky and Herman presented five classes or filters that depicted the picture of the media that was seen in the United States of America. The propaganda model focused on the inequality of the money and power among different levels which lead to the determination of the news that is to be delivered to the audience through filters. These filters played a significant role in the selection of the news, by keeping in view the interests of the media giants or business conglomerates. In order to maximize their power and profit, the following filters were used:

### **1. Size, Ownership and Profit Orientation of the Mass Media**

It is referred to as the first filter presented by Chomsky-Herman. They believed that due to capitalism, companies compete with each other and as a result of this, few companies gain more profit and power than the others. This helps them to dominate the market and fulfill their interests. They applied it to the media organizations that there are relatively few large media houses that control the news media. The power lies with these elites who direct the newspapers or channels. As being business oriented, they are more concerned with the profit, in terms of money, which compel them to filter the news in such a way which ultimately leads to the subjectivity of the news.

In the US, it is seen that the ownership of media is restricted to large size investments since a century ago. In the 1980s, there were 1,500 daily newspapers, 11,000 magazines, 9,000 radio and 1,500 TV stations, 2,400 book publishers, and 7 movie studios over 25,000 media groups, among which there were small local groups that were governed by large investors. Currently, this media is controlled by 24 media giants of the US which include the 3 television networks namely, ABC, NBC and CBS, renowned newspapers empires including The New York Times, the Washington Post, Wall Street Journal and much more.

In Pakistan, media organizations also work by keeping in view their profit, in terms of money and respect. For instance, the Independent Media Corporation of Pakistan is one of the largest media conglomerates, which owns Daily Jang, Geo Network and much more. In order to maintain its position after Hamid Mir's incident of Geo News, the channel made sure to present

such news which favors the government so that the profit and respect could be regained. Similarly, in today's scenario, much of the TV channels remained silent on Mumtaz Qadri's issue so that to avoid conflicts.

## **2. Funding**

Funding is the second filter of the Propaganda Model which explains that how media houses get funded. Advertisements play a vital role in bringing profits to the organizations. Without advertisements, it becomes difficult for the owner to produce large copies of newspapers or broadcast programs, as they demand high production cost. So advertisers, at one hand, facilitates the owners by selling ads to the media channels or publications while on the other hand, reduces prices of the media products on the consumer end. Therefore, large amount of money given by the advertisers, compel the media organizations not to rock the boat by delivering such contents which might upset the advertiser or disturb the advertising revenues and ratings.

For example, in the US, there were issues regarding environmental problems and, big companies were investing large amounts in its commercial on NBC but a series program on NBC failed to fulfill the interests of the advertiser as it remained objective on this issue. Moreover in Pakistan, Express channel is never seen to broadcast any news against the Sui Gas organization as it provides free resource to the owner. Furthermore, it is well known fact that fizzy drinks such as Coca Cola or Pepsi are dangerous for health but still the channels are seen bombarding the commercials of such products just because those companies provide a huge sum of money. Apart from this, the e-newspaper of The News places the advertisement of Qatar Airways on the first page on top. In order to sustain the advertiser, it will never place any news against it. Apart from this, the promotion of Q-Mobile in the popular sitcom, Bulbulay highlights that it is the main advertiser of the program. It also includes the example of Alkaram Studios and Oppo Mobile promotion in the drama, Suno Chanda.

## **3. Source**

The third filter proposed by Chomsky and Herman is Source. Source is such a filter which gives authenticity and credibility to news. It becomes difficult for the media outlets to send reporters and cameraman to various places for the collection of news and grab the audience. Words of a

famous personality or figure such as politician, businessman, or government official, make the news more effective and believable, which capture the viewers or listeners to a greater extent. This compels the media organization to maintain good and cordial relationship with such sources as their words convince the masses much more easily.

Like, In the United states of America, every type of news that comes through The White House, the Pentagon and the State Department in Washington D.C. is regarded as most powerful news which is believed by everybody. Similarly, in Pakistan, if the news comes from the source rather than by the direct observation of the reporter, it would be able to gain more audience attention. For instance, the press conference of Mustafa kamal and its coverage by the media channels helped to gather more audience response as they were the words of Kamal, himself uncovering the bitter realities growing within MQM.

#### **4. Flak**

Flak, being the forth filter of the Propaganda Model, is defined as the negative feedback or views that people give to any publication or program. Excessive bombardment of negative responses is harmful for the media channel or newspaper which ruins the image of the media organization. Moreover, pressure groups also play a major role in suppressing or producing such news that suits them or is better for the repute of the organization. So it is important for the media outlets, to check every type of news that how it will affect the audience, in orders to maintain its reputation. However, flak includes petition, sanction, complaints etc.

For instance, during Hamid Mir incident, broadcast of Geo channel was banned for a certain period of time. This led to create difficulties for media channel as its image was completely deteriorated. Apart from this, , the blasphemy law was kept silent after Governor Salman Taseer's murder as much of the journalists were avoiding standing against religious cliché. Furthermore, most of TV news channels were hesitant in covering Mumtaz Qadri issue so that it may not cover such news which later creates barriers in its proper functioning.

#### **5. Anti-Communism**

Whether these were the American media organizations or the large conglomerates are concerned, they feared Communism. For them, Communists were the demons or evils who took away the

wealth and power of the Capitalists and threatened their high class. So the elites tried their best to mobilize the people against a common enemy i.e. the communists. They induced an element of fear among the citizens which would further compel them to look for someone who could protect them from such demons or evils. This was regarded as the fifth filter.

For a long period of time, communism was a demon in the US but after the downfall of the Soviet Union, other evils such as terrorism, turned out to be its enemies. The post 9/11 political environment created the fear of terrorism among the American population. This was started first in Iraq and then to other Islamic states which were portrayed as terrorist states by the US. This was further amplified by the media, which drew a horrible picture of these states showing that terrorism is the greatest of all evils and the US will fight it at any cost. Therefore, with the passage of time, the “War on Terror” replaced Anti-Communism.

## **Other Applications**

The propaganda model is applied at various places which shows that how media works in different circumstances where they play up few stories while play down the others.

### **1. Media’s performance regarding NAFTA, subsequent Mexican crises and meltdown of 1994-1995**

NAFTA stands for North America Free Trade Agreement. Much of the difference in opinion was seen between the ordinary citizens and the elites and the businessmen regarding NAFTA. The citizens opposed it while the elites were in favor of it. Resultantly, news media highlighted such news and opinion of experts which supported NAFTA. Though, a large number of people opposed it but mainstream media promoted the elites view as media houses had their own interest which benefitted them in some way.

The labor tried to influence the votes but the weak labor was crushed down. Even the mainstream media did not give coverage, when the labor used provision to prevent labor union organization in Mexico. The media rather highlighted as labor aggression. With the Mexican meltdown, the media was sure not to blame NAFTA. The experts and media showed the merits of NAFTA that it had “locked Mexico in” which is not undemocratic. Thus, the labor remained

under siege in US for a long time but mainstream media never showed it. It ignored the labor conditions, the strikes and much more due to its interests.

## **2. Drug Wars**

During 1992-3, the health insurance controversy started in which media refused to take single payer option seriously though the public was in favor of insurance. The media remained uncritical as it provided urgency for the fiscal restraints and balanced budgets which were beneficial for the business community.

## **Conclusion**

Therefore, the propaganda model suggests that the corporate media ultimately manipulates the minds of the people by using the five filters that are mentioned above. The filters help to produce such a piece of news that serves the interest of the media owners. Certain factors tend to pressurize media, consequently leading to the subjectivity of news that earns more money rather than the quality of news.

## **Websites**

<http://beautifultrouble.org/theory/the-propaganda-model/>

[http://changingminds.org/techniques/propaganda/propaganda\\_model.htm](http://changingminds.org/techniques/propaganda/propaganda_model.htm)

<https://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/propaganda-model/>

<https://chomsky.info/consent01/>

<http://communicationtheory.org/propaganda-model/>

<http://publish.uwo.ca/~trmurphy/Soc240Lectures/Propaganda-Model-Revisited.html>