

The Propaganda Model in the Digital Age: A Review of Literature on the Effects of Social Media on News Production

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Abstract

The 21st century is best described by many as the Digital Age. The digital revolution at the beginning of the century has witnessed the introduction of social media platforms. About two decades now, globally, there are several questions on the effects of social media on the new production. While a section of media and communication experts view that social media has positively promoted news production, other scholars strongly see the negative side of social media in news production, especially with the context of the propaganda model. The objective of this article is to offer insightful review literature on the effects of social media on news production, within the context of the propaganda model to improve the reader's understanding of the role of social media news production. The review is divided into two sections; the first part gives us much insight into what the propaganda model is all about, and the second section critically looks at the net effects of social media in news making via the propaganda model.

Keywords: Digital revolution, News production, Social media, Propaganda model

Introduction

The year 1988 witnessed the introduction of the book "Manufacturing Consent," a book authored by Edward Samuel Herman and Avram Noam Chomsky. The book generally assesses the important political role of the American media in influencing events, examines the connection between the various media and organizations that finance as well as control them, in addition to discussing the major differences between news and propaganda (Herman, and Chomsky, 1988; Herman, and Chomsky, 2002; Herman, 2000). Herman and Chomsky contend that the American communication media are not only effective but also powerful institutions that execute system-supportive propaganda roles, by relying on self-censorship, internalized assumptions, and market forces through the adoption of the propaganda model. Proposed in the book, the propaganda model of communication is greatly influential to the extent that it has acquired many responses. The model follows many years of research that explain how mass communication media within America consolidate support for various interests that influence private and government or state actions (Herman, and Chomsky, 1988; Herman, and Chomsky, 2002).

As highlighted by Herman, and Chomsky, (1988), Herman, and Chomsky, (2002), Lukmantoro, et al, (2019), the propaganda model demonstrates its backing of these particular interests by employing the use of five filters, including (1) scope, joint ownership, holder/owner prosperity, as well as the revenue direction relating to the most influential mass media corporation; (2) advertising forms the primary source of revenue for the mass communication media; media dependence on data provided by companies and experts supported

as well as approved by the major informants and agents of power; “flak” as a way of punishing the media; and (3) “anti-communism” as an important domestic conviction and regulatory instrument. Indeed, presently, this communication model, which perceives the mainstream mass communication media as the primary institution that disseminates information, is questionable as regards its ability (Herman, 2000).

Technologically, the introduction of the internet has facilitated the rapid growth of social media that has offered important opportunities for individuals to interact (Shirky, 2011). This paper intends to carefully review and analyze the social media effects on news creation through the employment of the propaganda model.

Method

The author conducted a systematic search for very relevant scholarly articles to get the needs of the review literature from mid-2000 to December 2019 in the following three accredited and querying of online databases: Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science using the major keywords: “Propaganda Model”, “Digital Age”: “Social Media” and “News Production”. The author also evaluated bibliographies of very important scholarly articles on the websites of related organizations and communication and media studies journals such as *Communication Review* and the *Journal of Internet Review*. As soon as the author identified a group of related and potential studies on the subject matter, the author, as the review team member, conducted a screening to determine how relevant those articles are to the present study (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). Operating within the accepted procedures, the underlying preconditions for inclusion and exclusion were strictly adhered to. With the prior inclusion criteria serving as a guide, the following steps were followed: (1) Empirical studies and review of literature will be done through primary search, (2) the central theme for the search is aimed at social media, digital age, propaganda model and news production, (3) the author limited the search to only English published scholarly articles only, (4) the author did not adopt any time restrictions, (5) specialized and technical articles were excluded. To ensure objectivity and avoid biases or mistakes, the author dedicated a lot of time and resources.

A total of 21 scholarly articles that satisfied and fulfilled the selection criteria were included in this review. Also, the author considered the scientific quality of the articles before inclusion.

The Propaganda Model of New Making

The propaganda conceptual model proposed by Herman and Chomsky was developed when the internet had not developed widely (Herman, and Chomsky, 1988; Herman, and Chomsky, 2002). Given this, with the internet currently facilitating enhanced interaction or a two-way delivery of messages, it is inevitable that criticism will be the point at the propaganda conceptual model. The internet enables enhanced interactive communication. Media firms no longer have an overriding or dominant role in as far as the delivery of various messages to the general public is concerned. Indeed, originally one-way (unidirectional communication), the delivery of messages has been able to transform into a two-way (bidirectional) and currently assumed many directions (multidirectional).

The mass communication media, therefore, is not the only factor or force that influences the communication direction (Shirky, 2011; Herman, and Chomsky, 2002). As an essential new media, the internet may also play a significant role in delivering messages involving diverse parties. It is important to note that Herman and Chomsky did not acknowledge the presence as well as the power of the internet. In fact, in the second edition of their book “*Manufacturing Consent*” published in the year 2002, Herman and Chomsky contend that the introduction of the internet, as well as other new or emerging communication technologies, have been able to remove the numerous barriers in journalism and consequently allow for interactive and interactive media that was initially unexpected (Herman, and Chomsky, 2002). Herman and Chomsky also acknowledge the fact that the use of the internet can enhance not only the efficiency but also the scope of both individuals as well as group networks. Among the most remarkable examples provided by Herman and Chomsky was the success story of the Indonesian students who overthrew the Soeharto authoritarianism during 1998. Indeed, the internet

usage helped produce significant global publicity and heightened attention that had greater consequences. Although, according to Herman and Chomsky, although it is an important technological tool, the internet still has its limitations. In its early days, for instance, the internet was not a communication tool for everyone. Herman and Chomsky stress that only business organizations could afford to use the internet (Shirky, 2011; Lukmantoro, et al, 2019).

Herman himself shared a similar viewpoint that, as a new form of technology, the internet could aggravate existing problems. He further argued that the democratic style of communication could be realized by choosing diverse new technologies. On the other hand, he contends that there is little hope that this realization can be achieved if the use of the internet satisfies undemocratic objectives.

As noted by Herman, (2000) and Lukmantoro, et al, (2019), internet technology is certainly known to possess the capability of enhancing democratization as far as communication is concerned. On the other hand, the threat associated with the commercialization by various key players in the market made Herman still doubtful. Similarly, ideas that seem unreceptive to communism, as perceived by him, seem to be easily crushed by attitudes of various state or government officials or various forces within the market.

Herman and Chomsky's perception of the growth of new communication technology is significantly dominant within the political economy perspective, which contends that economics cannot be separated from politics ((Herman, and Chomsky, 1988; Herman, and Chomsky, 2002). Indeed, the outcomes witnessed within the political arena are a clear reflection of economic interests. Equally, the impacts from the political world shape the economic order within any society. On the other hand, the political economy perspective proposed by Herman and Chomsky is very different when compared to the critical political economy that was adopted by the philosophers of the Frankfurt School. Although both perspectives use Marxism, the Frankfurt School prevails on the economic determinism perspective. Babe, (2009) notes that this fact can be reflected in how they stress the issue of cultural assertions and consciousness. On the contrary, Herman and Chomsky still push for a viewpoint that is exemplified

economic determinism. Consequently, the issue of internet technology being a propaganda tool for those with significant influence is also considered as simply an economic issue.

The next issue that needs to be highlighted is the fact that Herman and Chomsky intentionally ignored and undervalued the emergence of internet technology as an important alternative to battling power. Dominant communication media, according to them, is deemed as the best tool that authorities use to relay various ideas. Ironically, however, they fail to offer a means to facilitate resistance against the existing power via the dominant communication media itself. Indeed, it must be acknowledged that the era of mass communication media is a period of darkness. On the contrary, Holmes (2005) notes that the digital era, the internet age, or the era of interactivity form periods form important periods that distinguish from the earlier time. It is only that Herman and Chomsky are still captivated with the mass media era that is engrained in darkness as well as being contrary to democratic values. Thus, it would be correct to argue that they intentionally embraced pessimism as well as never-ending despair. As highlighted by Fuchs, (2008), another important aspect that Herman and Chomsky intentionally disregard is the fact that internet technology, besides facilitating interactivity and not facilitating linearity, is the ability of the internet to support one-to-many message delivery patterns, few-to-many, many-to-many, as well as one-to-one. This demonstrates that internet technology can support diverse patterns of message delivery depending on the interests of various users who undoubtedly have many diverse interests.

Beyond a mere technical issue relating to internet technology, which has its uniqueness and superiority over mass communication media, the internet can be effectively employed in facilitating political resistance. This factor implies that the internet can effectively support political activism. Internet users, for instance, can engage in expressions that may ignite resistance and repulsion. Besides, the use of the internet may also distract not only the various business programs but also militarism using creating unrestricted networks, new conflict spaces, and movements. Other capabilities that the internet can

support include boosting critical media research or studies, dispute, and the new structuring of the journalistic communities. According to Kahn and Kellner, (2004), all these form revolutionary forces that have been made possible due to the presence of the internet. Unquestionably, internet technology can also be positioned as an essential modern public space despite the existence of a side that limits it.

Social Media Effects on News Creation through the Propaganda Model

Social media technology is tantamount to interactive participation among its various users. It is indeed an achievement of the interactive age, which is significantly different from the age of broadcasting. A special aspect of the communication media within the broadcasting era or age lies in the fact that it is exclusively focused on an individual entity, for instance, a radio or a television station or a newspaper producing firm that disseminates messages to the public. With the introduction of digital as well as mobile technology, large-scale interactions become easy to execute. As mentioned in Manning in Harvey, (2014), interactivity also forms an essential aspect of this new and modern media. Interactivity can be described as the communicative connections that happen fairly faster between one party and another. Consequently, messages that originally experienced delays can instantly be overcome. This is basically what makes the new communication media to possess social characteristics, including the sharing of messages, which can occur more instantly with more individuals being involved in it.

According to Fuchs, (2014), other characteristics confined in the social media include (1) information cognition, which implies that the social media enables information flow through the use of a given device, hence forming an important social activity (2) communication, which demonstrates that the social media forms an important site that facilitates reciprocal communication processes involving at least two individuals, which entails the exchanging of various symbols, with all the individual taking part in the interaction providing meanings to the shared symbols; (3) community, which demonstrates that the communication that takes place within the social media platforms is not

simply an act of social relations, but also involves friendship; and (4) collaboration and collective work, which demonstrates that messages exhibited on the various social media platforms are simply shared work. All these particular characteristics indicate that togetherness forms the most significant value witnessed with social media. Indeed, with the use of social media, not only are encounters between diverse parties enabled, but also conversations and political battles. The numerous conversations occurring on Facebook, for instance, have not only enabled free narratives but it has also been part of the netizen's or users' political interests.

Certainly, as Muller and Hubner, (2014) highlights, with the various political transformations witnessed with the authoritarian regimes, Facebook has played a significant part, including being able to enable an unlimited network of communication that entails the global community as well as the great influence it has in gathering citizens and exchanging information to meet particular goals; expanding influence among audiences in progressively large sizes; accelerating information sharing; socially binding amongst audiences through the sharing of information (both private and public); in addition to its ability to encourage its diverse users to utilize anonymous identity, particularly for users who would want to express their opposition views. These particular signs demonstrate that, as a social media site, Facebook does not only serve as a tool for exhibiting things or activities that are not significant, instead of the numerous statuses on Facebook, which form simply as well as spontaneous narratives also communicate political expressions that may contain great resistance as well.

Another significant example associated with the use of social media or the internet technology in fighting against the political regimes can be observed with the cases of the Egyptian nation and that of Syria. In both cases, cyberwars were witnessed between the numerous opposition groups and the ruling parties, with pictures, symbols, and battled narratives being employed to not only win loyalty but also prevent cases of leaders or ordinary citizens crossing to join the rival groups. During the Syrian and the Egyptian rebellions, for instance, cyber activists were able to develop as well as mobilize new kinds of grassroots

propaganda by employing the use of social media sites to not only plan, organize as well as inspire but also to persuade, motivate, in addition to helping to continue their massive efforts aimed at reshaping the society, while also minimizing the abuse of the fundamental rights of everybody and ensuring respect for one's dignity. Khamis, et al, (2013), grassroots propaganda in this context describes the interactive process of conveying information from bottom-up, many-to-many parties to many parties, which opens boundaries between the information producers and the consumers of the information.

As an essential social media platform, Facebook has shown its exemplary capability to remove boundaries from the users of social media as producers and consumers. Besides, it has significantly encouraged the engagement of its users in various social media-related activities. Technologically, it demonstrates how from a cultural context, individuals and groups can do appropriation and adjustment actions using a given emerging technology. In this case, Mazali, (2011) argues that Facebook has become an important modern public space for many of its users. Indeed, up until now, there exist two key arguments that place doubts on the significant social media role as far as political life is concerned. Firstly, social media technology is not very effective in facilitating political change.

Secondly, Shirky, (2011) notes that social media technology also has a significant disadvantage in terms of democratization since an oppressive government may utilize social media to silence the voice of those with divergent views from the oppressive government. Additionally, even if a given government may not be oppressive, Facebook may not be able to offer another important public space for various political actors who may appear within the mainstream media. Equally, the diverse political actors known to appear within the dominant media may attract or entice their respective followers on social media. Beyond that, Batorski and Grzywinska, (2018) state that the digital public space on Facebook appears to be significantly fragmented, as seen through the development of various homogeneous political groups. On the other hand, although Facebook still reveals several weaknesses regarding its use as an important public

space, there are alternative public spaces that may be employed in conducting political activism that is already available. Grouping features that reveal an inclination towards the homogenization of opinions are unavoidable political phenomena within the online media.

According to Sunstein, (2017), the social media phenomenon that has not succeeded in becoming a public space and which has turned out into rooms where individuals who have similar views can reaffirm the various political opinions that they already hold is referred to as echo chambers. The social media sites are not a platform to conduct political discussions or even rational debate, but they form comfortable spaces where individuals limit themselves to a narrow outlook that is unwilling to embrace divergent opinions. During the peak of a general election, for instance, Facebook pages turn out to be exclusive rooms. Gromping, (2014) notes that users sharing similar opinions usually comment separately and post the pages of persons who share the same viewpoints. Gromping, (2014) argues that interactions that oppose ideological sorting may be disregarded.

Another significant threat that is associated with the presence of social media arises from the political economy interests, which describes how exploitation happens when users utilize media that are deemed to be democratic. Currently, social media is greatly influenced by the development of various content that is produced by users as well as the numerous social networking sites that are easily accessed owing to increased digital advertising. This is related to what takes place with mass communication media, including radio or television, that employ accumulation strategies. What distinguishes it is the phenomenon known as the public commodity that implies that the general public is usually sold to the advertisers within the traditional mass media. Meanwhile, according to Fuchs, (2010), audience commodification within the social media describes users who create content. This means that the users are greatly involved not only in interactions but also in public formation, the generation of incentive activities, as well as content creation. A related issue that is commonly experienced by many Facebook users relates to privacy as well as the surveillance

practices conducted by the social media sites. Capital accumulation on Facebook is made possible through the commodification of Facebook users and the data that they have, an act that is termed as the exploitation of the consumer internet commodities. Sharing practices witnessed on Facebook include the data commodification and the euphemisms of sales, a factor that simply confirms that Facebook does not make the globe better. Still, the world merely becomes a more commercialized place that is similar to big shopping that has no exit (Fuchs, 2012). Indeed, based on this context, what Herman and Chomsky feared and criticized regarding market domination occurred.

Another major dark side associated with social media use is that it provides space that exacerbates hateful expressions that are usually aimed at particular groups. Especially minorities. The easy access of the cloaked websites, which are simply sites that are deliberately created by individuals and groups who conceal their authorship to purposely conceal their hidden political agenda. As noted by Daniels, (2009), these particular sites are intentionally utilized to carry out cyber racism by various white supremacists. In addition to these areas, Schou and Neumayer, (2017) note that many other fake social media site pages, including Facebook, are created to intentionally incite homophobic and anti-muslim reactions. The unpleasant thing also facilitated through the Facebook social site is the emergence of many false identities who not only create but also maintain hostile as well as racist conversations, for instance, the Muslim extremists in Denmark who intentionally conspired to murder as well as rape citizens. According to Farkas, Schou, and Neumayer, (2017), that is no doubt the reality of antagonistic practices that is facilitated through the imaginary social media site accounts.

Conclusion

The propaganda model that was put forward by Herman and Chomsky has greatly contributed as far as media studies are concerned. At the macro-level, the model has also been able to sharply expose the situation of the contemporary or modern capitalist society, which is usually controlled by a few state elites and business corporations. Through their use

of the political economy perspective, Herman and Chomsky greatly condemned the dominant U.S mass media as they have become an essential tool for disseminating propaganda propagated by the various parties in power. The two writers also seem to be the only individuals who have embraced the dogmatic attitude as seen through their acknowledgment of the orthodox outlook of classical Marxism. Economics, on the other hand, is regarded as a major influencing factor in the politics of the society, with the economy being seen as an important basis that significantly determines politics and politics being considered as a mere economic structure. Consequently, the powerful elites in the society who control media find it easy to automatically influence ideological developments that are either allowed or outlawed from being broadcasted. Worse more, Herman and Chomsky failed to see the likelihood of resistance being conducted by various media professionals who were deemed to be capital power engines.

The internet and other emerging media are deemed to be the most effective means for various media capitalists to achieve horizontal integration. This act fulfills their control of diverse kinds of media. Distrust regarding the emergence of new communication media also makes them consider that internet use is ultimately dependent on various market controls. Herman and Chomsky disregard the emergence of the internet, which appears to offer new opportunities, especially in terms of the propagation of activism, an act that may offer great resistance to the major ruling elites. In other cases, the internet and other emerging media may be considered as new or modern public spaces for many internet users. Through the new, emerging media, citizen interactivity and participation may be effectively facilitated, with discussions or even disputes taking place within those public spaces. Beyond that, the new, emerging media can also propagate grassroots propaganda, which is simply a form of open resistance against anybody oppressively exercising his or her power. It should be noted that, ultimately, social media becomes an important comfortable space for anyone to meet or group.

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