

**MEDIA MANIPULATION: A  
PUBLIC DECEPTION THROUGH  
SUBLIMINAL SEDUCTION**

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# **MEDIA MANIPULATION: A PUBLIC DECEPTION THROUGH SUBLIMINAL SEDUCTION**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The mass media serves as a system for communicating messages and symbols to the general populace.<sup>1</sup> Noam Chomsky sees that, the media plays an important role in shaping the public's opinion especially the individuals; and such messages and symbols<sup>2</sup> configures the mindset of such based on what is being conveyed upon the media outlet. In the Philippine Constitution where it says that: The State recognizes the vital role of communication and information in nation building.<sup>3</sup> The use of media plays a pertinent role especially on how our nation is being projected to the general public and especially to its allied and neighboring countries. Wherein it is inextricably connected to how our nation progresses and grow - it is where the role of investors, trade and exchange, and tourism comes into the picture. The mass media are not just changing the outside world but they appear to be undermining our inner

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<sup>1</sup> Chomsky, Noam & Herman, Edward. "*Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of Mass Media*". Pantheon Books: New York. 1.

<sup>2</sup> For Paul Ricoeur, symbols posits power that also shapes the choices and decisions of the masses; and in shaping such, the one who is in possession of symbols can get what they want in the affirmative and get away with it. It is possible for them to get away with it, because the individual who was formed by it thinks that their decision is their own. For example the symbol of Christianity advocates obedience, respect, and more. But it is different with Chomsky based on the avenue and the degree of effort such as the use of media outlet for "influencing" to push through. - *dissenting opinion*.

<sup>3</sup> 1987 Philippine Constitution, Article II, Section 24.

world.<sup>4</sup> The mass media is seen as an instrument to mobilize and reconstruct how we see society.

It recognizes the magnitude of press freedom that would encompass speech and expression. Wherein they are not just civil rights but also political rights, where they are entitled to such on the basis of their liberty. And through this they may be able to participate in public affairs with a *locus standi* (legal standing) and appeal in order to advocate their voice for: transparency, equal rights, abuses, scandals, and corruption. Which was supported by the constitution which provides that: No law shall be passed abridging the freedom of speech, of expression, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and petition the government for redress of grievances.<sup>5</sup>

The freedom to establish (private) broadcasting outlets does not guarantee everyone is able to exercise equally their right to freedom of opinion and expression.<sup>6</sup> Since media outlets - as subordinates where ascribe to elite domination that acts as gatekeepers in filtering and disseminating on what comes-out.

Media today deviated from its very context in conveying the truth and shifts to the adherence with propaganda. Propaganda has become problematic in part because the lines have blurred among the information, persuasion, and entertainment functions of media. Implications for ethics are striking, for those who would be successful

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<sup>4</sup> Howitt, Dennis. *"The Mass Media and Social Problems"*. Pergamon Press: Maxwell House, Fairview Park, Elmsford, New York 10523, U.S.A. (1982). 4.

<sup>5</sup> 1978 Philippine Constitution, Article III, Section 4.

<sup>6</sup> Beger, Guy. *"Freedom of Expression, Access to Information and Empowerment of People"*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, place de Fontenoy: 75352 Paris 07 SP, France (2009). 20.

propagandists, those who would avoid being propagandists, and those who would care to be more sophisticated targets for and students of propaganda.<sup>7</sup>

The propaganda model consists of five so-called filters. These “filter out the news fit to print, marginalize dissent, and allow the government and dominant private interests to get their messages across to the public” through the five filters.<sup>8</sup> The media only shows what it wants to show with subtle messages that would manipulate the individual's decision through the means of an outlet and instilling it into the minds of the subject. The media only reflects and projects the view of the elite domination of the media and marginalization of dissidents that results from the operation of these filters occurs so naturally that media news people, frequently operating with complete integrity and goodwill, are able to convince themselves that they choose and interpret the news “objectively” and on the basis of professional news values.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Christians, Clifford & Wilkins, Lee. *The Handbook of Mass Media Ethics*. Routledge: 270 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10016 (2009). 130.

<sup>8</sup> (1) the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms; (2) advertising as the primary income source of the mass media; (3) the reliance of the media on information provided by government, business, and "experts" funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power; (4) "flak" as a means of disciplining the media; and (5) "anticommunism" as a national religion and control mechanism. - Goodwin, Jeff. *What's Right (And Wrong) about Left Media Criticism? Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model*. Sociological Forum, Vol. 9, No. 1, Special Issue: The 100th Anniversary of Sociology's First Classic: Durkheim's "Division of Labor in Society." (Mar., 1994). 104.

<sup>9</sup> Chomsky, Noam & Herman Edward. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of Mass Media*. 3.

## A. Media Manipulation

The primary function of mass media is that they serve to mobilize support for the special interests that dominate the state and private activity.<sup>10</sup> In understanding society first we must look at who is in position which determines on how society functions. In Chomsky's book manufacturing consent, the major decisions on what happens in our society are dictated by major corporations which owns the media, investment firms; and hence they are the ones who are in position to make such decisions. They have the latter to satisfy their interest politically and socially. One of the ways where they were able to do such, is through the use of mass media. This satisfies the concerns that leads to questions of who owns the media, who controls the media, who recruits media personnel, what sorts of personnel are recruited, how programmes are produced, how content is determined, how stylistic factors influence the output, what effects pressure groups have on programmes, amongst others.<sup>11</sup>

Chomsky argues that, manufacturing consent is inextricably connected to understanding how our thinking faculty works as manufactured by propaganda. The role of propaganda processes whereby they mobilize bias, and the patterns of news choices that ensue.<sup>12</sup> Major corporations or the elites had been manipulating the media that would cater their own interest and induce it in the publics - audiences perception as the normative criterion on how the society should and must behave as a

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., ix.

<sup>11</sup> Howitt, Dennis. "*The Mass Media and Social Problems*". [phar.]. 9.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

standard. The power of the mass media to change, alter, or manipulate the audience imply something of the nature of the audience.<sup>13</sup>

The main objective of propaganda is to target the audience such as the: masses and the political class. The eighty percent of our population comprises the masses whose main function according to Chomsky is to follow orders, not to think, and not to pay attention at anything. The masses, they are the ones who are widely affected by propaganda. The other twenty percent, the political class or the specialized class. They are the ones who are more educated, participates more in the decision making, and exercise more their suffrage since they are the ones who are more knowledgable of such. The propaganda model does not assert that the media parrot the line of the current state managers in the manner of a totalitarian regime; rather, that the media reflect the consensus of powerful elites of the state–corporate nexus generally, including those who object to some aspect of government policy, typically on tactical grounds.<sup>14</sup>

A propaganda model focuses on this inequality of wealth and power and its multilevel effects on mass-media interests and choices. It traces the routes 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 messages across to the public.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Howitt, Dennis. “*The Mass Media and Social Problems*”. 21.

<sup>14</sup> Chomsky, Noam. “*Necessary Illusions: Thought Control In Democratic Societies*”. Pluto Press: London (1989). 207.

<sup>15</sup> Christians, Clifford & Wilkins, Lee. “*The Handbook of Mass Media Ethics*”. 130.

Sara Mill noted for Michel Foucault, power is not a possession but a strategy.<sup>16</sup> A strategy wherein you position yourself in a particular disposition wherein power becomes beneficial to your vantage point. In this case the major corporations are able to maximize their use of power by means of such propaganda to influence the people. Through this influencing they were able deviate the issue from them (the elites) to other issues or create issues and sometime exaggerate them to capture the viewers attention or to make them believe that they are going to be affected by it, namely: political, criminal, safety and security, or territorial; or even create amusements, distractions, and leisures. People's interest and concern are diverted from the real issue. For example, in the political sphere, an elite would support or criticize a particular candidate that would affect their holdings or ideology. Through media outlets they are able to propagate it to the masses by showing or influencing them who to vote or not. This is made possible through advertisements showing the good of that particular candidate or showing the immoral acts of that candidate and telling the public not to vote him/her.

Since major corporations can't do the things they want on their own. That is why they have personnels that acts as gatekeepers. The gatekeepers are the ones who filters or narrows down what needs to be shown in the public - in reliance with their superiors interest. If a particular story doesn't correspond to such interest, then the latter cannot be made public or it would be mitigated and tailored-fit in order to jive with their interest. The model argues, from its foundations, that the media will protect the interests of the powerful, not that it will protect state managers from their criticisms;

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<sup>16</sup> Maboloc, Christopher Ryan. Epistemology discussion on Discipline and Punish by Michel Foucault.



the persistent failure to see this point may reflect more general illusions about our democratic systems.<sup>17</sup>

It becomes a panoptic system that deprives the individual of autonomy, and thought and culture of their freedom of expression.<sup>18</sup> For Foucault, panopticism acts as a disciplinary mechanism, that induces in the inmates (the audience in this case) a state of consciousness and permanent visibility that ensures automatic functioning power.<sup>19</sup> The public who are influenced by the normative claims through media outlet should and must act in accordance to such. Despite the lack of surveillance in the public, still they adhere to such and think of it as their own decision as a kind of imprint where it unconsciously commands them in conformity to standard that is dictated.

## **B. Public Deception**

In the previous discussions it is made clear that media manipulates audiences where their view needs to be indoctrinated. Through such practices as selecting topics, framing issues, filtering information, binding debates within certain limits, and other strategies, the mass media serve the interests of dominant, elite groups in society that own the mass media.<sup>20</sup> The question: “how does the elite control the media?” does not even satisfactorily correspond to how they influence or manipulate the media and is not even a question. Its not that, they control the media, in fact, they own the media.

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<sup>17</sup> Chomsky, Noam. “*Necessary Illusions: Thought Control In Democratic Societies*”. 207.

<sup>18</sup> Harris, Jan & Taylor, Paul. “*Critical Theories of Mass Media: Then and Now*”. Open University Press: Penn Plaza, New York (2008). 69.

<sup>19</sup> Foucault, Michel. “*Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*”. New York: Vintage (1977). 201.

<sup>20</sup> Trier, James. “*Exemplary Introductory Critical Media Literacy Documentaries*”. Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, Vol. 50, No. 1 (Sep., 2006). 70.

It is where in fact, media, manufactures our consent. They tell us what those in power need them to tell us so that we can fall in line.

For Theodore Adorno, he recognizes during his time where, in Hitler's Germany he had witnessed the powerful role that mass media could play in shaping the opinions and behaviour of populations, and a riving in America he confronted a society in which the mass media's influence was ubiquitous but apparently benign.<sup>21</sup> Despite the rampant propaganda of mass media in manipulating the stream to influence its audience. Adorno sees that it is possible for the media to influence and shape the audiences opinion but only in a subtle manner. In this case it has a high probability that the masses which comprises eighty percent of the general population according to Chomsky. We can say that, they are the ones who are more prone to deceit and would become little-by-little be docile.

Adorno provides one example where the use of media outlet reaches vast places and propaganda can be easily conveyed and understood by the masses. But it has a inherent tendency to make the speaker's word, the false commandment, absolute.<sup>22</sup> And through such, the access to it, is without any difficulty or worry. Adorno argues for example that, the radio becomes the universal mouthpiece of the Fuhrer (the leader); his voice rises from street loudspeakers to resemble the howling of sirens announcing panic – from which modern propaganda can scarcely be distinguished anyway...The gigantic fact that the speech penetrates everywhere replaces its content.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Taylor, Paul and Harris, Jan. "*Critical Theories of Mass Media: Then and Now*". 63.

<sup>22</sup> Adorno, T.W. and Horkheimer, M. "*Dialectic of Enlightenment*". Trans. J. Cumming. London: Verso Books (1997). 122.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 159.

The public also has another role in this case. They are not just a mere audience, or a target to be influenced. The public are also costumers and advertisers comes into the picture. The role of advertising, media costs more than consumers will ever pay. The advertisers fills the gap. The are paying for audiences. It isn't so much that the media are selling you a product, their output. There also selling advertisers a product, the audiences.

The real market of the media giants, then, “is advertisers, and the ‘product’ they sell is audiences, with a bias towards more wealthy audiences, which improve advertising rates”. The major media, in other words, “are corporations ‘selling’ privileged audiences to other businesses”. This “filter” obviously puts at a severe disadvantage those media that really do rely largely or exclusively on individual subscribers for their revenue.<sup>24</sup>

Since the real target of the advertisers are exclusively for the elites. The public particularly the masses are left in a disadvantaged. Wherein they became an innocent target for the market and advertisements are made public and majority of the viewers are the latter. They enslave themselves into a kind of thinking that to possess that something would give them a status or recognition in the society, because they were able have access to it. The advertisers are aware of this, but they still go with it by making them - the masses, think that they need it, that they want, and that they need to have it. The elites are able to gain profit through the advertisers, and the advertisers in return earns more through their advertisement to the masses in general.

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<sup>24</sup> Goodwin, Jeff. “*What's Right (And Wrong) about Left Media Criticism? Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model*”. 105-106.

### C. Subliminal Seduction<sup>25</sup>

Subliminal advertising is widely and frequently used and that it is successful in selling product.<sup>26</sup> Subliminal advertising is a technique of exposing consumers to product pictures, brand names, or other marketing stimuli without the consumers having conscious awareness.<sup>27</sup> The advertisers stimulates or creates desire to the audience without noticing that such desire are instilled unto them. Advertisers were able to made this possible by: (1) getting the attention of the audience, (2.) Stimulate interest, (3.) Lastly, manufacture desire.

It makes people buy products they don't need; it promotes dangerous products and encourages harmful behavior; it is deceptive and manipulative; it is intrusive, irritating, offensive, tasteless, insulting, degrading, sexist, racist; it is loud, obnoxious, strident and repetitive to the point of torture; it is a pack of lies; it is a vulgar bore.<sup>28</sup>

Subliminal messages targets the audiences subconscious<sup>29</sup> where their innermost desires houses and to bring it about. Wherein, subconscious mind accepts an idea, it

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<sup>25</sup> The term: "Subliminal Seduction", was formulated by Wilson Bryan Key and puts it into writing.

<sup>26</sup> Feinberg, Richard; Henry, Myron Gable; & Wilkens, Lynn Harris. "An Evaluation of Subliminally Embedded Sexual Stimuli in Graphics". *Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (1987). 26.

<sup>27</sup> Trappey, Charles. "A Meta-Analysis of Consumer Choice and Subliminal Advertising". *Psychology & Marketing*. Vol. (13) 5. (August, 1996). 517.

<sup>28</sup> Kirkpatrick, Jerry. "A Philosophic Defense of Advertising". *Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (1986). 42.

<sup>29</sup> According Freud, id is our warehouse of primitive and impulsive drives, such as the drives for thirst, hunger and sex. Advertising, the critics say, taps or triggers these impulsive drives in ways of which we are unaware. Advertising, consequently, deceives, defrauds and manipulates unwitting consumers into changing their tastes to conform to the desires of the greedy, selfish producers. Thus, manipulation is achieved subliminally. *Ibid.*, 45. [phar.].

begins to execute it. Subliminal messages seduces the very reason of an individual into a kind of thinking that, they were the ones who who made that choice. But in its entirety, the advertising companies manipulates the viewers perception by instigating desires. Advertising inherently, by its nature, deceives and manipulates consumers into buying products they don't need or want; it does this through subliminal advertising.<sup>30</sup>

Subliminal seduction here, is a kind of persuasion that can be equated with coercion- force persuasion. Since they, generally target the viewers subconscious and through such it drives them to conform to it by actually abiding to it. Advertising, is just another form of physical force, perhaps only a little less direct than pointing a gun at the consumer.<sup>31</sup> The individuals who are mostly affected by this seduction are the masses. Wherein for Chomsky, they are the easy target for such propaganda, for such advertisements who could be easily manipulated and influenced to conform to a particular trend. They can be considered as the docile individual in our society because of their fragility. Because of such, where they try to conform with a particular normative claim that seeks recognition, where in fact, it doesn't actually helps them.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 46.

## CONCLUSION

Adorno made himself clear, when he says that media plays a pertinent role in influencing the public but only in a subtle manner. But in this case this subtleness of influence in its entirety affects the masses, and subtle in a manner that it doesn't encompass the the specialized class. The wide range of media goes beyond the boundaries and could easily transmit their propaganda easily that only caters the interest of the elite. Because of its wide range, advertisers use this advantage to get the audiences and majority of such audiences are the masses. They are able to make such possible, by instigating desires to the viewers by the use of subliminals. Where in fact, it is very effective to increase sales. But, immoral because of the means employed. They use subliminals to stimulate desires that coerce their decision into a kind of thinking as their own.

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