

| № | Назва поля | Поле для заповнення |
|----|--|---|
| 1 | Тип елемента* | Семинар |
| 2 | Назва документа (українською мовою) | Корпоративний медіа-вплив та аспекти мовного воркшопу |
| | Назва документа (англійською мовою) | Corporate Media Influence and Aspects of Language Workshop |
| 3 | Автори/Редактори (українською мовою) | Ренді Штайнгауер |
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| 4 | Корпоративні автори (українською мовою)* | |
| | Корпоративні автори (англійською мовою) | |
| 5 | Резюме/анотація (українською мовою) | |
| | Резюме/анотація (англійською мовою) | |
| 6 | Ключові слова (українською мовою) | Корпоративний медіа-вплив |
| | Ключові слова (англійською мовою) | Corporate Media Influence |
| 7 | УДК** | |
| 8 | Статус* | Неопублікований |
| 9 | Деталі публікації* | |
| 10 | Вид матеріалу* | Семинар на Міжнародній науково-практичній конференції “Міжкультурна комунікація: мова — культура - особистість” |
| 11 | Вид доступу* | Кожний |
| 12 | Підрозділ НаУОА чи лабораторія | Кафедра англійської мови та літератури |
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| 14 | Дата | 13.06.2012 |
| 15 | Рецензований (ТАК/НІ) | |
| 16 | URL | |
| 17 | Посилання | |
| 18 | Проекти | |
| 19 | Спонсори/грантодавці | |
| 20 | Інша додаткова інформація | |

Corporate Media Influence and Aspects of Language Workshop

Randy Steinhauer

The last several decades have witnessed the growing influence of transnational corporations in our daily lives and control over public policy in the West. Given the concentration of ownership of corporations in the hands of the wealthiest strata of society this control could also be viewed as a form of plutocracy, rule by rich oligarchs. My own inquiry into the nature of corporate rule suggests that its three most basic components are domination of the economy, the mass media, and the government to advance the interests of big business and the wealthy at the expense of the public well being as well as to promote the American Empire including its military adventures. Of these media supremacy, the ability to shape public perception in democratic societies, may well be the most important.

Perhaps the most vital task of corporate media is convincing the public of their neutrality. Some networks even run commercials assuring viewers that they are beholden to no group or interest including big business. The most they may be willing to admit to is occasional sensationalism to boost ratings or circulation, such as featuring lurid crimes or scandals. Nothing must challenge the pretensions to independent journalism since the power of any form of propaganda is rapidly neutralized once its agenda is revealed.

I would like to begin by examining the structural basis for corporate media control. The most obvious, if perhaps overstated, aspect of this is the massive concentration of media in corporate conglomerates. As journalist Ben Bagdikian wrote in *The Media Monopoly* American mass media is dominated by five major conglomerates owning most of the newspapers, magazines, book publishing, movie studios, and radio and tv stations in the U.S. Under the guise of promoting competition the U.S. Telecommunications Act of 1996 began removing limits on media cross ownership, allowing massive buy ups by a few conglomerates, vastly increasing media concentration and monopolization of markets.

And, as discussed by Mel Hurtig in *The Truth About Canada* Canadian media is more concentrated than in any other Western country: not surprising since our laws on media concentration are the weakest. Cross-ownership is a major problem with the same corporation dominating newspaper and broadcast media in a given city. Our mass media too is dominated by a few huge conglomerates such as Rogers, Quebecor, Shaw, and CTVglobemedia/CHUM.

One of the first actions many media corporations take after mergers is to close expensive foreign bureaus, further restricting diversity on reporting international events.

The lack of knowledge displayed by many Americans regarding events beyond their borders isn't improved by this.

Certainly having a number of different separate outlets would seem preferable to a monopolistic control but even a multitude of separate outlets would provide little diversity if each of them simply reflects the world view of the rich and corporate executives. This is especially true when the independent outlets are all channelling the same source.

The deleterious effects of media concentration are further enhanced by the nature of their ultimate controlling ownership. In the U.S. ABC is owned by Disney, infamous for the sweatshop production of its trinkets, and, until recently, NBC by General Electric and CBS by Westinghouse, both huge military contractors. Additionally media conglomerates are often owned by right-wing billionaires such as Rupert Murdoch's media empire. New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg and far-right former Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi are also media titans, leading to questions not only of general media bias in their empires but of direct personal conflict of interest as well.

Aside from the issue of ownership by media moguls and transnational corporations with direct financial stakes in the stories reported in the media there is also the question of where the corporate media gets its funding from. A majority if not almost all of the money received by the corporate media comes from the advertising dollars of other corporations. Advertising accounts for 50% of magazine revenues, 80% for newspapers, and almost all radio and television broadcasting revenues. The global advertising revenues for corporate media are in the hundreds of billions of dollars per year. As Ben Bagdikian has pointed out even many of the "news" supplements in papers on such topics as real estate or automobiles are actually advertising bought and paid for by the businesses being promoted. Even ostensibly independent media such as America's Public Broadcasting Service or the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation accept corporate advertising to pay for part of their broadcasts. In return advertisers expect a supportive editorial and programming environment. Ultimately corporate media is in the business of selling viewers to advertisers. It could also be asked why the public spectrum of the airwaves should be sold in perpetuity to private concerns.

Additionally cable and satellite networks function as gatekeepers who can manage news slanting by determining which channels do or don't get carried in accordance with their own corporate biases.

In the early 20th century U.S. media was wide open and openly partisan. The veracity of some news items may have been questionable and there were problems with "yellow journalism" whipping up hatred to start wars, but there was also a wide range of views presented with political parties and unions publishing their own papers and numerous papers available across the political spectrum in larger cities. Attempts to "clean up" this chaotic nature and present a more professional approach with reporters trained in schools of journalism may have resulted in more generally accurate reporting with less open confabulation but also in a more restricted political range being presented.

One major aspect of this professionalization of the press corps was the sourcing of stories. To avoid potential charges of inventing facts or quotes the "serious" media has become increasingly dependent on "official sources" for its quotes and facts. This gives

tremendous power to these sources to legitimize news stories and turns reporters into stenographers parroting their sources and incapable of rendering any independent judgements.

The nature of the sources quoted by corporate media reporters are therefore of vital importance to the slant of the news provided. The sources overwhelmingly fall into the category of those favourable to the established order. These may include high government officials, politicians, corporate CEO's and other upper executives, as well as "unnamed government sources". Right-wing corporate funded "think tanks" often provide the talking heads on corporate media interview or panel shows. Economic questions are usually referred to neoliberal economists or business leaders who can be counted on for business-friendly analysis. This provides a closed system of opinion for corporate news media.

The jockeying among reporters to be called upon during an elected official's press conference illustrates another aspect of this concern for official sources. Being called on for a question by the President of the United States or another major leader is a career booster for a reporter. Anyone with a reputation for asking embarrassing or awkward questions may find themselves cut out of the loop. This can be seen as well in the high value government sources. An unfriendly interview truly attempting to get at the truth with hardball questions will probably result in the reporter in question losing their privileged access. This was taken to its absurd conclusion in the Iraq invasion where the only access for U.S. reporters was to be embedded with the troops, their movements carefully controlled and stories favourable if they wished to continue reporting.

The media corporations, like corporations in general, are in business to make a profit and one way of doing this is cutting costs by cutting staff. As a result many reporters are increasingly overworked, frenetically running from story to story while trying to meet their deadlines. Few would have the time to do any sort of in depth analysis of the issues involved in the stories they cover, even if they had the inclination to do so. And very few media outlets would be willing to spend the time and money involved in digging into a story a la Woodward and Bernstein during the Watergate scandal, especially if the result was a dead-end or, even worse, offended a major advertiser. Its much easier, safer, and cheaper to just regurgitate a press release from government or business as if it were actual news.

The Sound Bite Society by Jeffrey Scheuer introduces a more subtle aspect of corporate media slanting to the Right. As television news evolved and viewers' attention spans became ever shorter the time spent on a news story also shortened, with shorter and shorter sound bites rather than longer analysis. As Scheuer points out this shortening has an inherent bias in favour of the simple messages incessantly repeated by the Right to reinforce the economic status quo. Any progressive critique of the existing system would require a more detailed analysis to challenge the ingrained mindset.

A plethora of television news magazines and cable networks would seem to offer the possibility of a wide variety of opinions but the result is usually just an endless repetition and reinforcement of the same narrow range of opinions, with the same or interchangeable guests with scripted talking points making the rounds to fill the airwaves. This was certainly the case in the run up to George W. Bush's carefully manufactured

wars in which the corporate media's echo chamber was instrumental in selling the wars to a gullible, frightened public.

The neutrality of big league news anchors is presented as a given but it should also be remembered that they may have vested interests in a story beyond their careers themselves. The anchors may be making hundreds of thousands if not millions of dollars per year, giving them a very personal stake in stories dealing with wealth, such as tax policy.

Broadly, I would consider corporate media as falling into two general groups. The old-style establishment media is overwhelmingly pro business but maintains some basic journalistic standards. They have been pulled ever more rightward by the rise in recent decades of the more extremist, rabidly neoliberal media, such as Fox News and the Clear Channel radio network in the U.S. and the *National Post* and Sun Media in Canada as well as right-wing talk shows. By presenting far right viewpoints as normal they help to push these ultra-capitalist, corporate libertarian positions while accusing any of the more moderate corporate media of a liberal bias if they do actually criticize any business actions or U.S. military aggression. The more centrist members of the corporate media may indeed be more socially or culturally liberal when it comes to social mores or lifestyles but they, like their more socially conservative critics, overwhelmingly support the underlying capitalist system, corporations, and the American Empire. This "liberal" wing of the corporate media seeks to include as many previously excluded, marginalized groups as possible in the capitalist system with only a few minor reforms or band-aid programs to the system itself.

I would like to now move from a consideration of the forces which make the mass media little more than an appendage to the governing elite in the West to a look at the actual day-to-day techniques and policies that are instrumental in promoting these positions.

Certainly one method of disciplining corporate media is the withdrawal of corporate funding by their advertisers. An example of the money involved occurred several years ago when the *Los Angeles Times* ran a series of articles critical of General Motors. The auto giant promptly pulled its 5 million dollars a year in advertising from the paper. Everybody else get the message?

As I previously mentioned corporate media is in business to make money and thus may usually be expected to smile favourably upon their high rated shows but this may be overruled by other considerations, as MSNBC has shown. Phil Donahue had the network's highest rated show but it was cancelled in 2003 after he dared to have anti-war guests on the program, as an internal MSNBC memo revealed. In their fervour to line up behind George W. Bush war corporate media overwhelmingly gave uncritical credence to any pro-war propaganda. Meanwhile a study by Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting of the four U.S. broadcast networks found only 6% of their U.S. guests were sceptics concerning the need for the upcoming war and less than 1% were anti-war activists despite widespread public doubt about the need to rush to war.

The war hysteria corporate media tried to whip up was also driven by the Bush administrations post 9/11 attempt to cast anyone opposing war as a traitor sympathetic to the terrorists, with CBS Evening News anchor Dan Rather's disgraceful abandonment of

any shred of journalistic objectivity as he vowed to line up wherever George Bush told him.

The movement to a more ostensibly fact-based objectivity in news reporting can have strangely paradoxical results. This is found in the phenomenon of false balance. To give the impression of fair, balanced coverage on a controversial issue news outlets may give equal time and credibility to both sides even when one may be utterly lacking in merit. There is virtually 100% consensus among climate scientists that human generated global warming is happening and will have serious deleterious consequences for our future, but this is frequently not the impression one gains from corporate media coverage. To balance a climate scientist speaking about global warming the corporate media will frequently also feature an interview with an "expert" outside the field casting doubt on this established scientific result, producing confusion in the minds of the general public. Oddly, when a story involves government or business sources with favourable reporting on issues reflecting the interests of the wealthy there seems to be far less media interest in presenting information from the other side.

A major bottleneck for stories to pass through in their journey along the corporate media pipeline is the editor. Editors function as the day-to-day gatekeepers, deciding which stories will be covered and what their spin will be. They may occasionally report ongoing social problems but rarely examine the underlying economic cause. Stories that may be unflattering to corporations or harm the bottom line tend largely to be either ignored or have a business friendly spin placed on them. Capitalism itself is never to be criticized when reporting on the misdeeds of a "few bad apples" caught in some particularly unsavoury or illegal activity.

By choosing what to focus on editors can determine what is news. Along with owners and advertisers, editors function as part of filter mechanism in the news as described in Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman's propaganda model of the corporate media.

Apologists for corporate media may take umbrage at the suggestion that journalists would be censored but this censorship tends to become more internalized than overt among the successful reporters. After having editors kill a few of their stories as "too controversial" journalists will tend to get the idea of what the acceptable limits are without having to be told. As George Orwell observed. "Circus dogs jump when the trainer cracks his whip, but the really well-trained dog is the one that turns his somersault when there is no whip."

The political orientation of individual reporters themselves is not that important since they're not the ones determining news slant. Reporters are largely just workers on news factory floor producing the product they're told to make.

In addition to direct techniques used by corporate media to give the news a business-friendly slant there are also techniques used by outside corporations or conservatives to steer news media.

Big business can facilitate media's channelling of the corporate message by smoothing the way for them, making it as easy as possible to broadcast the corporation's viewpoint. One technique is called the video news release. This involves production, often by a public relations firm, of a video on a controversial topic of interest to a corporation such

as a pharmaceutical or tobacco company. A video package is sent to television media which may then run it. The video may be raw unedited footage or a complete finished "news" story with its own "reporter". A station may run the entire video news release or portions of it but in either case it is common practise for tv stations to pass this off as their own reporting rather than acknowledging its real source. This is especially attractive for local stations with low budgets. U.S. government departments have also had stations air these pre-packaged videos as real "news".

As previously mentioned many news outlets will run a corporate press release, either in whole or in part, as if it were a real news story, making it easier for them to generate content to fill space or air time. Some media experts estimate that up to 50% of news is planted by the public relations industry to make the stories appear as legitimate news rather than advertising.

Panel and interview shows dealing with controversial economic or political issues frequently feature guests from right-wing corporate funded "think tanks" who will endlessly repeat the same loaded words or phrasing to promote capitalist goals favouring the wealthy and the corporations. This repetition has the desired effect of ingraining their ideas in the viewers minds but it also has a similar effect on the program's hosts and newscasters themselves, tugging their viewpoints in an ever more corporate-friendly direction.

The need for cable news networks to fill the time for their 24 hour a day news coverage also plays into the hands of right-wing interests. As Linguist George Lakoff has pointed out well financed right-wing institutes have bookers who can help television and radio stations and networks fill up air time by providing a stable of conservative "experts" who will gladly appear on their shows. This helps to explain why, as Lakoff notes, 80% of the talking heads on these shows are right-wing.

The guests on these programs are sometimes sent in undercover by organizations with secret agendas. An infamous case of this involved the Pentagon in the run up to the Iraq war. Numerous retired military officers were secretly put back on the payroll and sent out to news talk shows where they posed as disinterested retired officers offering independent analysis, when they were in fact secretly being paid by the U.S. military to promote the upcoming Iraq war.

Third party advocacy is often a feature of news stories in which someone funded or employed by business is presented as a neutral expert by corporate media on a controversial topic while covertly functioning as a spokesperson for the industry involved.

Another aspect of corporate influence over mass media involves ostensibly neutral independent front groups set up by corporations or their public relations firms. This technique, often employed by environmentally destructive industries such as logging, coal, or sewage companies uses greenwashing to give the appearance of environmental concern to groups promoting the industries' damaging policies behind the facade of citizens' groups. These astroturf phoney grass-roots groups are often presented by corporate media as legitimate concerned citizens.

Fraudulent citizens' groups may also be used to aid in corporate media and U.S. government promotion of wars. In the propaganda campaign to set the 1991 Gulf War in motion Hill and Knowlton, the public relations firm handling pr for the Royal Family of Kuwait, created a separate front group called Citizens For a Free Kuwait to give the

appearance of American public support for the coming war including staged pro-war demonstrations. In widely publicized testimony before Congressional committee a Kuwaiti teenage girl enraged public opinion with tales of premature babies dumped out of incubators being stolen from hospitals by invading Iraqi troops, an outrage that solidified public support for the war. It was later discovered that this girl was the daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador to the U.S. and the entire story had been fabricated under the direction of the public relations firm. Hill and Knowlton went on to distinguish themselves during the 1990's by mounting a massive pr campaign on behalf of the fossil fuel industry denying global warming. Corporate media also served to promote the 2003 Iraq invasion by publicizing pro-war demonstrations organized by the right-wing Clear Channel radio giant. The role of the corporate media in promoting right-wing causes was certainly on view in their ceaseless disproportionate coverage of the fringe Tea Party, financed by oil billionaire David Koch.

Far right corporate media with its ranting pundits also do the dirty work for right-wing politicians, raising wacky subjects or conspiracy theories, while politicians can stay above it, benefiting from the right-wing support generated without having to acknowledge or deny it. Far right media is also useful in disciplining politicians who drift too far from economic orthodoxy. Additionally it opens space on the right and can pull mass media even further rightward.

Polls can provide a distorted view of public opinion, producing distortions through leading loaded phrasing of questions. Public opinion polls are often used and reported in highly selective ways that match the agenda of political elites rather than providing a useful tool for democratic decision making. Often they are used to shape opinion rather than honestly reporting it by choosing which questions are asked and which aren't and their wording.

Flak consists of negative feedback from powerful people who could threaten the media effectively.

For example Pentagon public relations officers provide an easily followed script for news media. If media give unflattering coverage they are castigated by the Pentagon public relations department or military contractors. Government and big business also use flak to attack any coverage they deem damaging to their interests and discipline it if it veers off the standard right-wing business and American Empire course. Libel suits and threats of them from businesses such as tobacco companies can also be used to muzzle any negative reporting.

Right-wing has founded organizations to monitor media for any signs of anti-corporate or anti-capitalist reporting or any coverage unfavourable to the American Empire or its military. Most notable is Accuracy in Media, funded by oil companies and other corporations. Often flak is directed against media that are semi-independent and have more range than full corporate media, witness the constant attack by right-wing flak on U.S. Public Broadcasting Service and Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Both of these are capitalist oriented but still have some critiques of system and so are targeted by the Right. Bill Moyers, a PBS regular, suffered constant attack from right-wing flak groups for daring to pursue honest reporting even though the network features numerous business programs for an overwhelmingly pro-business orientation.

Corporate media can also be helpful in furthering industry by echoing its flak campaigns against unfavourable scientific findings. A major component of this is the attempt by big business and its front groups to label any findings that may endanger profits or their ability to carry on with business as usual as "junk science". such as research on global warming or pesticides.

With declining jobs and pay in traditional media many journalists themselves are now working for public relations firms.

The context-free presentation of many news organizations in the corporate media also lends itself to a business or U.S. friendly delivery. This may take the form of historical amnesia. In the lead-up to both U.S. Iraq invasions American corporate media cast Saddam Hussein as a super-villain second only to Hitler, somehow neglecting to mention that he was America's close ally during the 1980's, during which time he committed most of his atrocities. Al-Qaeda and Islamic militantism were the epitome of evil after 9/11 but the American media seemed strangely unaware that only a few years before Islamic radicalism had been actively promoted and financed in Afghanistan by the U.S. and its Pakistani and Saudi allies to create a military quagmire for the Soviets. Corporate media was shocked at the 2008 global capitalist collapse, with little reference to its origins in the years of deregulation of the financial sector in accordance with neoliberal principles as celebrated by the business press. Down the memory hole. Presenting only a portion of present day controversies is another way to remove context. This is certainly evident in the one sided presentation of Palestinian attacks on Israel while ignoring or downplaying vastly disproportionate Israeli attacks on Palestinians.

Corporate media can be counted on to overwhelmingly cheer lead for any "free trade" treaty yet will also highlight particularly horrendous sweat shop abuses while apparently fail to see any connection between the two. A total discontent.

The corporate media is also useful in helping the Right cast government programs or laws threatening big business profits in a discrediting light to undermine them. This is frequently done by picking an extreme or ridiculous example and trumpeting it as if it were typical of the entire regulatory system. Perhaps the most infamous example was of an elderly woman who was badly burned by an excessively hot cup of McDonald's coffee and won a large lawsuit for damages. This was distorted by Right-wing corporate defenders and their media allies as proof of the need for tort "reform" to limit big business liability for the harm it causes, in an attempt to cast all safety, environmental, or health based civil lawsuits against corporations as frivolous or contrary to the public good.

A tactic that may be used by corporate media pundits against critics of capitalism and corporate-led globalization and control is to dismiss them as conspiracy theorists. This would seem to imply that anyone claiming the financial or political elites cooperate in working for their own interests against the public good must believe in grand conspiracies. Certainly the ruling elite get together to advance their own welfare at international meetings, whether the World Economic Forum every January between the world's leaders and the CEOs of the planet's thousand largest corporations or the World Trade Organization, but these well-publicized meetings can be criticized without terming them conspiracies. I would propose that rather than conspiracies what we see are the

results of what I would call an emergent phenomenon. If a system, such as the deregulated global banking industry, is set up in manner that encourages greed and plundering as part of business as usual, and the people attracted to it are themselves driven by a greedy, amoral self-interest, one may confidently predict that certain results will emerge without the need for any formal conspiracy. This is not to suggest that collusion doesn't occur, but organized greed can work just fine without a conspiracy as people take care of their own and their class interests. A wink and a nudge will suffice.

A favourite technique of the Right, often reflected in corporate media presentations, is to impugn the motives of any critics of big business or the plutocrats. The problem for the corporate oligarchs in the West is that their underlying motives of greed and power are so close to the surface and blatantly obvious upon even cursory inspection. It is therefore vital for them to try to smear the critics of the system by projecting ulterior motives upon them as well. Critics of U.S. led invasions must be wimpy liberals afraid to fight, or anti-American or Muslim fundamentalist sympathizers. People marching in the street against economic injustice become professional protestors (no doubt jobless as well). Independent climate scientists warning of global warming caused by burning fossil fuels must be falsifying data just to get more grants. Environmental groups are just trying to whip up public panic to get more donations. Europeans who are fighting their governments' "austerity measures" to pay for the greed of global bankers are labelled spoiled, coddled workers unable to face the new economic reality. These absurdities from the Right are often echoed if in a more subdued manner by corporate media.

Global warming offers another example of a technique used by corporate media to deal with problems potentially dangerous to industry. For years corporate media was instrumental in helping sow doubt in the public mind about global warming through burning fossil fuels. As the evidence for human generated global warming became too overwhelming corporate media changed its tack. It now largely acknowledges the problem and dangers but the new stalling tactic is to propose phoney solutions such as carbon trading. Anything to allow industry to continue with business as usual rather than actually cutting and eliminating fossil fuels. After all, surely the Market can solve the problems it created.

There are also ways corporate media - by reflecting the mass culture - aids in reinforcing the dominant power structure:

Infotainment has, in the last couple of decades, become a weapon of mass distraction, as with the breathless reporting on the latest doings of the Kardashians. The result is the promotion of a passive, consumerist society: the more time spent on frivolous "news" the less danger there is of people being influenced by real news, further dumbing-down Western society, keep the sheep docile. "Amusing ourselves to death" in the prescient words of Neil Postman. The obsessive coverage of sports serves a similar function.

Corporate media promotes "new age" programs for "self improvement" as if all aspects of your life were under your control as an individual and fulfillment can be achieved through self empowerment via self-appointed gurus: you are a powerful individual who can make it happen, if you can dream it you can make it happen, you can will a different future into existence for yourself if you just believe in it enough, if you can visualize it. Ultimately this is just a form of withdrawal from real social activist engagement against

systemic basis for problems by appealing to individual greed and ego and holding out fraudulent hope and "solutions". It further contributes to atomization of society and true powerlessness for workers and the poor that the plutocrat oligarchs would like to see, ignoring social/political/economic aspects of poverty and marginalization and the need for concerted united group class union action to achieve results

During the 1990's identity politics and culture wars - especially cantering on University curricula - proved a useful distraction - race, gender, and ethnic origins were debated in mass media as the relevant defining characteristics determining people's lives thereby dividing everyone up into their various groups, with virtually no mention of the vastly more pervasive issue of wealth and class.

Naturally the powers that be in Western societies would prefer everyone to believe and follow the images they present as reality but there are always those who manage to see through their programming. The cool image presented in cultural mass media for these people is that of the cynical hipster slacker, someone who just sits on the sidelines smirking while others follow their leaders. This self-neutralizing of dissent is certainly preferable for the leadership to someone who sees through the system and actively works to change it.

Corporate media often play an agenda setting role- public concern about issues tends to follow media coverage of these issues. Drug abuse was a major focus under first Bush administration but now faded out of blanket coverage. The degree of coverage can in itself determine what's hot and what's not. Heavy coverage of an issue by corporate media can make it news. The importance of a story may be magnified by the amount of space or time devoted to it or its placement as the lead news piece or above the fold.

When a news story supports the interest of corporations or American Empire it is loudly trumpeted on page one but when it is shown to be false the retraction is slow to come, buried in the back pages or simply not reported. This was vividly illustrated last year with the story of the fiendish Muammar Gaddafi and his viagra fuelled rape squads terrorizing the Libyan populace with their depredations. This fed into the narrative being spun by the American government which was overwhelmingly supported by corporate media. The NATO bombing could now also be sold as a feminist issue. The only problem was that once independent outside investigations began the story fell apart. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch found there were no victims of these rape squads or doctors who had treated them and the entire story appears to have been a fabrication of rebel forces in Benghazi, probably under the direction of their American advisors. Yet this debunking received virtually no coverage in U.S. corporate media since a rebel victory would give the U.S. backer more control over Libyan oil as well as military bases.

The major threat to corporate media's hegemony over the gathering and dissemination of news is the Internet. With this vehicle independent journalists have the capacity to rival the corporate media in the masses of people reached at a fraction of the cost. This threatens to expose the general public to ideas and information and interpretation outside the accepted limits of economic and political debates. It is therefore vital for corporate media to counter this. Often this takes the form of ridiculing the Internet to undermine its effectiveness. Certainly, with its wide open access, the Internet is home to many off-the-wall sites but denigrating any media outside the establishment mainstream only serves the

interests of those in power. One way corporate media reacts is to try to compete by providing their own on-line magazines and programs. The vast disparity between the resources available allows the big boys to crowd out the smaller players. A major threat is the endangerment of net neutrality. Under this rule the Internet service providers act as common carriers with no favouritism to one site over another. Ongoing attempts by telecommunications companies would give carriers the ability to privilege some sites with easier access or faster service, producing a two-tier Internet with corporate sites given higher priority and faster downloading. The very real possibility of outright censorship of "subversive" sites looms as global capitalism and the American Empire face their continuing collapse.

There is also the damaging effect of corporate media on the political process itself. Corporate media is a major contributor to the democratic deficit in our society. By reporting on politics as if they were handicapping a horse race, mass media helps to create elections devoid of any real issues. The emphasis is placed on a candidate's image, charisma, polling numbers, and presentation, resulting in a meaningless beauty contest. Any contender threatening the status quo of entrenched business interests is ignored, marginalized, ridiculed, or demonized. What we are left with is an increasingly narrow spectrum of allowable political discourse, a debate between the centre right and the far right.

The focus is on civil rights social issue conflicts between liberals and conservatives to give the public the illusion that there is a real difference, that the public has broad choice, when this simply masks degree of elite consensus on economic policy. There is little difference except on social issues that don't affect the corporate bottom line or the wealth of the plutocrats.

The capitalists who own and operate corporate media and those financing it with their advertising dollars tend to not be big fans of blatantly honest anti-capitalist or anti-corporate critiques. While often allowing socially liberal views and discussion of minor reforms, mass media will mangle, distort, or ridicule criticisms or proposals directly threatening to the system itself, when not ignoring them altogether. This was certainly the case with the blatantly anti-capitalist Occupy Wall Street movement, which corporate media did its best to ignore or lampoon until it was spotlighted by the Democracy Now alternative media broadcast and became big news. Even then many reports in corporate media tried to blunt the Occupy message by spinning it as against only Wall Street fraud or the bailouts rather than as against the system itself. The coverage shows the importance of alternative, independent media.

Corporate media controls limits of allowable debate. e.g. U.S. healthcare debate over what form of private health care is best - public single payer healthcare as in the rest of the developed world is not even seriously discussed. Spending on social programs is always a major topic of debate for U.S. corporate media but any suggestion of cutting the much larger military spending is greeted with horror.

There is massive coverage of stock market and business news while labour is only covered if there is a strike. Wage increases are considered bad since they can cut corporate profits even though most people are wage earning workers rather than significant stock owners.

Any hint of government programs to aid the general public is dismissed as socialism

which is equated with communism.

Corporate media ignores the atrocities of dictators who are U.S. allies unless they become an enemy as with Saddam Hussein or Manuel Noriega.

The structural inability of corporate media to fully examine an issue for fear of the questions this will raise in the minds of viewers or readers leads to a very strange, truncated presentation. Serious analysis of issues that would threaten the corporate elites or the American Empire are taboo. The limits of acceptable debate keep alternatives off the discussion table so any of these "discussions" are strangely circumscribed. This results in a surreal make-believe element to mass media's public policy "debates", a shadow boxing staged feeling, like trying to assemble a jig-saw puzzle with many of the pieces missing. As American novelist Thomas Pynchon wrote "If they can get you asking the wrong questions, they don't have to worry about the answers."

Corporate media has been instrumental in propagating the myth that what's good for big business is good for the rest of us. Canadian mass media, while not as extreme as the American, follows the same general trend. One bright spot is the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation which, although firmly set in the capitalist world, at least leaves some room for alternatives. It serves as an anchor in the real fact-based world, as in the run up to The U.S. led conquest of Iraq, one reason for relentless conservative attacks on it and Stephen Harper's ongoing budget funding cuts.

Ultimately the corporate media may be seen as the chief instrument for the advancement of hegemony. In a modern society with democratic trappings rule by an economic elite requires co-opting the support of the exploited majority who must be convinced to vote against their own interests. Gaining their participation in their own exploitation requires selling them an ideology that this is for their own benefit, is the right thing to do, or is unavoidable. Today this is the ideology of neoliberal Market supremacy and the altruistic effects of the American Empire and corporate media plays its role in disseminating these ideological myths as if they were the natural order of life.

I'm not suggesting that all corporate media use all these techniques all the time. This presentation has been given in an attempt to make you aware that mass media in the West is far from neutral and that it reflects the interests of its powerful owners and advertisers to preserve and expand the economic status quo. The corporate media is hardly a monolith with everyone parroting the same exact line as with the old Soviet system and there is still room for some progressive reporting, if for no other reason than to prevent the public from regarding the corporate media as totally irrelevant and out of touch. However, by and large the interests of the financial elite in Western society are held paramount. How much of the structure and techniques I've described in Western mass media apply to your own situation here is something for you to perhaps reflect upon.