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the Age of the Internet, Big Data and Social Media**

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## CHAPTER 6

# Propaganda 2.0: Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model in the Age of the Internet, Big Data and Social Media

Christian Fuchs

### 1. Introduction

Herman and Chomsky's book *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*<sup>1</sup> was published nearly 30 years ago. Today, not only has the Soviet Union disappeared, but we have also experienced the progressive intensification of neoliberalism and financialization, the 2008 world economic crisis, austerity, constant growth of inequalities, and the extension and intensification of nationalism, new racism, and xenophobia. The news media are in crisis. Advertising has shifted from print towards targeted online ads. Today we not only have the World Wide Web and mobile phones, but also Big Data, Google, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Flickr, Instagram, Wikipedia, blogs, etc. have become important means of information and communication. Given these changes, the question arises if and how we can make sense of the propaganda model in the age of the internet and social media.

Herman and Chomsky summarise the propaganda model in the following words:

The essential ingredients of our propaganda model, or set of news 'filters', fall under the following headings: (1) the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms;

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(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. These elements interact with and reinforce one another. The raw material of news must pass through successive filters, leaving only the cleansed residue fit to print. They fix the premises of discourse and interpretation, and the definition of what is newsworthy in the first place, and they explain the basis and operations of what amounts to propaganda campaigns.<sup>2</sup>

The key aspect is that wealth and power inequalities shape what is considered newsworthy, what gets reported, and what is heard, read and watched. It should be noted that the propaganda model is not a theory. A theory of propaganda and ideology requires a systematic theory of society and capitalism, in which the role of culture, ideology and propaganda is clearly defined. It is for example unclear why exactly there are five elements and how they are theoretically justified. Moreover, entertainment and the spectacle as a filter that displaces and colonises political communication is missing from the model. Jürgen Habermas argues that entertainment is part of the process of the feudalisation and de-politicisation of the public sphere: ‘Reporting facts as human-interest stories, mixing information with entertainment, arranging material episodically, and breaking down complex relationships into smaller fragments – all of this comes together to form a syndrome that works to depoliticize public communication.’<sup>3</sup> It is therefore best to view the Propaganda Model (PM) as a not necessarily complete list of elements that are ideologically influencing factors on the agenda of the news media. The fifth element of anti-communism should probably best be generalised in terms of dominant ideologies that influence the media.<sup>4</sup> Also Joan Pedro suggests to term the fifth dimension ‘dominant ideology’.<sup>5</sup> In the thirty years since the publication of the book, especially the neoliberal ‘belief in the “miracle of the market” (Reagan)’<sup>6</sup> has become dominant.

In respect to criticisms arguing that the model is functionalist and does not take resistance and contradictions into account, Herman argues that ‘the system is not all-powerful,’<sup>7</sup> that there are ‘uncertain and variable effects’ and ‘contesting forces’<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Social Media and Power

One often hears that social media and the decentralised character of the internet overcome hierarchies and foster a participatory culture and democratic commu-

nication. Edward Herman has voiced scepticism about this assumption: ‘Some argue that the internet and the new communication technologies are breaking the corporate stranglehold on journalism and opening an unprecedented era of interactive democratic media.’<sup>9</sup> He argues that new technologies ‘permit media firms to shrink staff even as they achieve greater outputs, and they make possible global distribution systems that reduce the number of media entities’.<sup>10</sup>

### *2.1 Size, Ownership, Profit Orientation*

The dominant social media platforms have concentrated ownership. Google-co-founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin own 42.4% and 41.3% respectively of Alphabet’s class B common stock. Page controls 26.6% of the voting power; Brin 25.9%.<sup>11</sup> Facebook owner Mark Zuckerberg controls 85.3% of the company’s class B common stock and 60.1% of the voting power.<sup>12</sup> Social media is also a highly concentrated market: Google controls 71% of the world’s searches, and Facebook and its subsidiary WhatsApp account for 48% of users worldwide of the top 10 social media platforms.<sup>13</sup>

Both Google searches and the Facebook news feed are very important sources of news today. In respect to the 2016 US presidential election, the group of 18–29-year-olds considered social media the most important news source:<sup>14</sup> For all who are 30 or older, TV news was the most important source. Taking the entire adult population together, 78% used television during one week for learning about the election, 65% used digital information sources (48% news websites; 44% social networks), 44% used the radio, while 36% read print newspapers. The data indicate that the internet does not substitute but merely complements traditional news sources. Among younger people, however, it is the most important source of news.

Algorithms determine the ranking of Google’s search results and Facebook’s news feed. The centralised ownership of these companies (from which users are excluded), combined with the huge market share of users the two companies hold and the fact that both platforms are important news sources, results in the circumstance that ownership also means control over algorithms that determine news sources for a significant part of the population. Both algorithms are intransparent; they are corporate secrets. As capitalist companies, Google and Facebook want to protect themselves from competition. Factors that play a role in Facebook’s news feed algorithm e.g. include your closeness to a person posting content (closeness meaning how regularly you interact with them through messaging, likes, etc.), the type of a post or the achieved popularity of a post.<sup>15</sup> It is also possible to boost a particular post by paying for it, or to buy a sponsored ad that targets a specific group of users’ news feeds. Google’s PageRank algorithm ranks web pages using various criteria, such as the number of sites that link to them – a weight is given to each link. So, if the *New York Times* links

to your web page, then this link is likely to have a higher weight than the link your best friend posts on her/his site. Also, on Google is it possible to purchase sponsored links that are boosted to prominent screen positions.

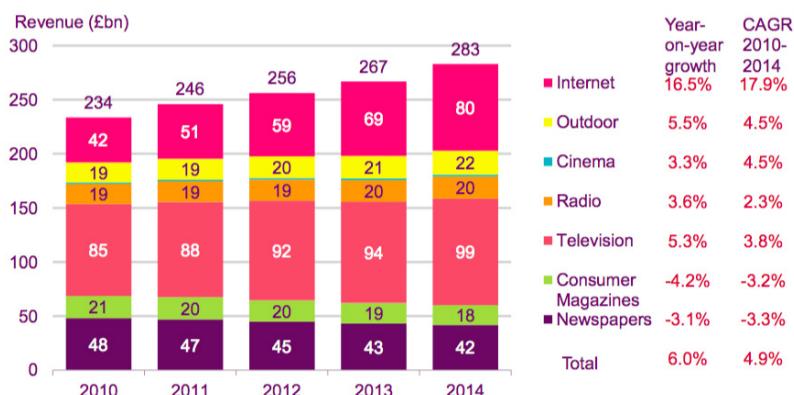
The discussion shows that social media's ownership matters in several respects. Firstly, social media markets tend to be highly concentrated. Private ownership locks users out from the control of algorithms that determine the priorities of how search results and news are presented. The specifics of the algorithms are secret because of the secret nature of intellectual property and because capitalism's laws of competition foster secrecy.

Online advertising is, however, contradictory. On average, users only click on one out of one thousand advertisements.<sup>16</sup> And even then, it is uncertain if they really stay on a linked page and if they buy something there. The effects of targeted online advertising may therefore be overstated. Because of the fetishistic idea that algorithms and Big Data allow perfect interest-based targeting, advertisers gain the impression that they can sell commodities via social media. If it turns out that this is a misconception, then targeted advertising may lose credibility and social media capitalism's financial bubble may burst and cause the next dot-com crisis.

## 2.2 Advertising

Figure 6.1 shows statistics about the development of the distribution of global advertising spending.

The data shows that the share of online advertising has increased from 17.9% to 28.3% in the years from 2010 until 2015. During the same time, newspaper advertising revenue has dropped significantly and its share has decreased from 20.5% to 14.8%. Online advertising has globally become the second most

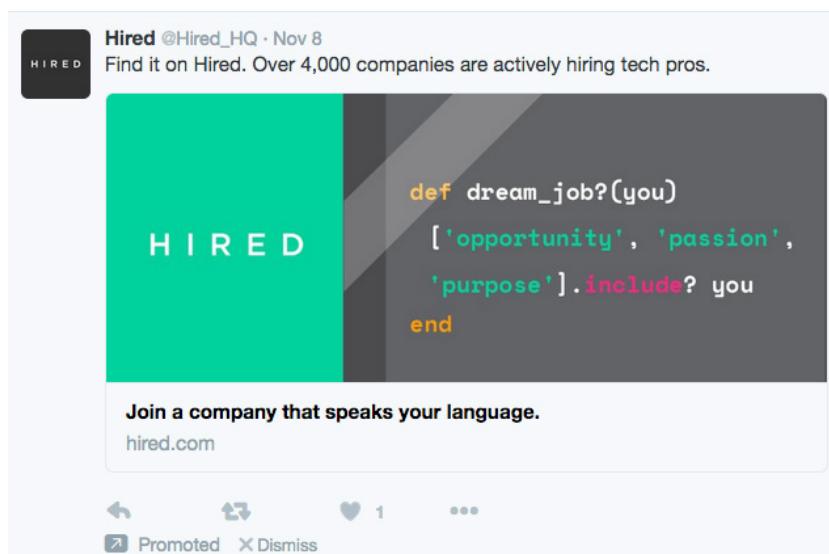


**Fig. 6.1:** The development of global ad spending's distribution.<sup>17</sup>

important form of advertising after television advertising. Especially in times of crisis, online advertising seems to appear to advertisers as the more secure option because it is individualised through extensive surveillance of online behaviour and algorithmically targeted. Traditional news journalism is in a crisis of a commercial character, notably in relation to its advertising revenues.

Google, Facebook and Twitter are not just sources of news and information. These websites are also among the world's largest advertising agencies. They are in the business of selling targeted ad space as a commodity and derive their revenues almost exclusively from targeted advertising.<sup>18</sup> Herman and Chomsky remarked in an interview about the PM in respect to the second filter that Google and Yahoo 'are heavily dependent on advertising revenue'.<sup>19</sup> Given their high numbers of users, platforms such as Google and Facebook can expect to attract large shares of ad investments seeing that companies are interested in reaching a large number of people from their targeted audience. Social media advertising allows both broad reach and precision targeting.

Herman and Chomsky argue that advertisers prefer to run ads during TV programmes that are 'culturally and politically conservative',<sup>20</sup> i.e. entertainment and spectacle oriented programmes and news and discussion programmes that have a right-wing, conservative and pro-capitalist bias. The effect is that media that focus on entertainment and spectacles tend to attract more advertisements, whereas independent media 'suffer from the political



**Fig. 6.2:** Example of a promoted tweet. Data source: twitter.com, accessed on 11 November 2016.

discrimination of advertisers.' On social media, the situation is slightly different, but not necessarily better: on Facebook and Twitter, users can pay to promote postings. Facebook, Twitter and Google allow targeted ads. On Twitter, it is also possible to promote trends. Figure 6.2 shows a promoted posting from Twitter.

Promoted posts show up on Twitter users' news feeds, profiles or tweet detail pages. Figure 6.3 shows that on Twitter, targeting is not only possible based on gender, languages and devices, but also based on search keywords, followers of particular users, interests, TV shows, behaviours, and events. Figure 6.4 shows details of Twitter's behavioural targeting feature.

On television, advertisers target particular audiences who watch specific programmes. In newspapers, they target the typical reading audience. On social media, multiple audiences can be targeted at once because there are micro and niche publics. This makes the logic of advertising different on social media than in traditional media. The overall effect is an online advertising-user-spiral, in which more and more advertising revenue shifts from print to digital due to the targeting possibilities. The advertising-circulation-spiral was first observed in the realm of newspaper advertising,<sup>21</sup> but it certainly also contributes to the monopolisation of online markets. In 2015, the finance and insurance industry, followed by the retail industry, comprised the largest share of ad spending on Google. Amazon was the largest advertiser with investments of US\$ 157 million.<sup>22</sup> In 2013, Samsung was with US\$ 100 million the biggest advertiser on Facebook.<sup>23</sup>

#### SELECT ADDITIONAL AUDIENCE FEATURES

- + Add keywords
- + Add followers
- + Add interests
- + Add tailored audiences
- + Add TV targeting
- + Add behaviors
- + Add event targeting

#### **▼ Customize where Promoted Tweets appear.**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Users' timelines<br>Promote Tweets into the home timeline of the specific group of people that you are targeting | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Profiles & Tweet Detail Pages<br>Promote Tweets to users when they visit profiles and tweet detail pages on Twitter. |
|--|--|

**Fig. 6.3:** Targeting of ads on Twitter.

Browse and select behaviors

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No items selected

- Finance
- Household
- Insurance
- Lifestyles
- Media
- Retail**
- Technology
- Travel

**All of Retail**

- Children's product buyers
- Entertainment buyers
- Fashion clothing buyers
- General purchase behavior
- Gift & gadget buyers
- Home & garden buyers
- Luxury brand buyers

**Fig. 6.4:** Behavioural targeting on Twitter.

The discussion shows that online advertising acts as a filter in several ways: (i) It allows large transnational corporations with large ad budgets to confront a large targeted audience with content and ads; (ii) Regular content becomes ever more difficult to discern from advertising. There is no clear temporal or spatial differentiation. Corporations are interested in native online advertising and branded online content as it allows them to deceive users and to almost act like news media, effectively undermining the independence of reporting. Companies can increase reach via social media; (iii) The online advertising-user-spiral increases social media's power in advertising and news-making and advances monopoly tendencies in the online economy; (iv) An important fourth dimension that needs to be added which Herman and Chomsky do not discuss is that advertising means exploitation of audience labour.<sup>24</sup> On social media, users' digital labour produces a data commodity and is exploited by the platforms for selling targeted ad spaces.<sup>25</sup>

### 2.3 Sourcing

Colin Sparks argues for an extension and refining of the PM:

The central departure from the classical formulations of the PM is that, in place of the stress it gives to the uniformity of the media, we now expect to find diversity. The divided nature of the capitalist class, the presence of powerful critical currents which find legitimate public expression in a capitalist democracy, the need to address the concerns

of a mass audience, political differentiation as a marketing strategy, all point to the necessity for any viable media system to include a range of different opinions. [...] Of course, it is entirely true that the range of dissenting voices is carefully controlled. There tends to be a preponderance of elite voices, and those in turn will tend to reflect the views of powerful groups in economics and politics. [...] Sometimes, however, radical individuals do get regular exposure in the media [...] partly at least for the good business reason that it fits the marketing strategy of particular media to attract the substantial number of radical individuals towards their niche in the market.<sup>26</sup>

Des Freedman<sup>27</sup> discusses the example of the British tabloid the *Daily Mirror* that during the 2003 Iraq war substituted its usual focus on celebrities and scandals with an anti-war campaign. The example shows that also mainstream media, especially in situations of crisis, can take alternative positions, and that such exceptions matter. Freedman argues for giving attention to 'both structure and agency, contradiction and action, consensus and conflict'.<sup>28</sup> Herman and Chomsky acknowledged the possibility for diversity: 'The mass media are not a solid monolith on all issues'.<sup>29</sup>

Sourcing as a filter is different online than in broadcasting because the internet has a decentralised and global architecture. Manuel Castells<sup>30</sup> argues that the internet allows mass-self-communication, which means that a larger number of producers online as compared to the broadcast model can reach a larger audience. The basic difference between computer networks and broadcasting is that the network is a universal machine, at once a technology or production, distribution and consumption. Combined with its global reach and significant bandwidth rates, this allows the phenomenon of user-generated content. User-generated content does however not automatically imply political plurality and diversity. The key question about communication power shifts from the control of production towards the control of attention and visibility. Attention and visibility, however, also need to be produced and are thus aspects of production. Gaining online attention and visibility requires money, time and labour-force. Everyone can in principle produce content online, but in a capitalist society only a minority attracts online visibility and attention.<sup>31</sup>

A first online asymmetry concerns the fact that 'the traditional media themselves have occupied the internet and are dominant news providers there; [...] they have the resources and pre-existing audiences to give them a huge advantage over alternative media potential rivals'.<sup>32</sup> In November 2016, the most popular online news site was CNN.com. While CNN was on 11 November, 2016, the 72<sup>nd</sup> most accessed website in the world, the independent news sites alternet.org and democracynow.org were only ranked in positions 5,967 and 9,493 respectively on the list of the world's most accessed websites.<sup>33</sup> Notwithstanding, alternative online media certainly attract significant audiences. At the same time, they tend to face resource problems because they are not organised as capitalist businesses.

<b>BUY REAL FACEBOOK FOLLOWERS COUNTRY TARGETED AT \$21</b>				
1000 FACEBOOK FOLLOWERS	2000 FACEBOOK FOLLOWERS	3000 FACEBOOK FOLLOWERS	5000 FACEBOOK FOLLOWERS	10000 FACEBOOK FOLLOWERS
<b>\$21 ONE TIME</b> FREE SERVICES	<b>\$41 ONE TIME</b> FREE SERVICES	<b>\$61 ONE TIME</b> FREE SERVICES	<b>\$91 ONE TIME</b> FREE SERVICES	<b>\$171 ONE TIME</b> FREE SERVICES

**Fig. 6.5:** An example for online attention as commodity. Data source: <http://www.followersandlikes4u.com>.

*Second*, money is an important factor in attaining online visibility and attention. It is possible to boost one's online attention by buying likes, followers, re-tweets, etc. Figure 6.5 shows an example of a company that sells Facebook followers. Users with a budget to spend can buy more visibility online. If your number of followers is large enough, then it is also more likely that others start following you because there are reputational hierarchies and the artificially inflated number of likes, re-tweets and followers is a form of psychological impression management.

*Third*, there are reputational inequalities. Social media attention is highly stratified. A small elite group of users dominates online visibility and attention.<sup>34</sup> As an example, table 6.1 shows the Facebook pages that have the largest number of fans.

The data indicate that corporations and entertainment dominate social media attention. News and information therefore tend to focus on popular topics.

Rank	FB Page	Number of Fans	Type
1	Facebook for Every iPhone	500 300 326	App
2	Facebook	174 559 960	Corporation
3	Cristiano Ronaldo	117 252 364	Footballer
4	Shakira	104 416 196	Musician
5	Vin Diesel	100 378 269	Actor
6	Coca-Cola	99 713 570	Brand, corporation
7	FC Barcelona	94 669 625	Football team
8	Read Madrid C.F.	92 645 690	Football team
9	Eminem	91 308 332	Musician
10	Leo Messi	87 147 610	Footballer
	Bernie Sanders	4 653 316	Politician
	Karl Marx	1 450 139	Political theorist

**Table 6.1:** The most popular pages on Facebook. Data source: <https://www.socialbakers.com>, <http://www.facebook.com>, accessed on 12 November, 2016.

Politics is less visible and more marginalised. Bernie Sanders and Karl Marx, two symbols of left-wing politics, have significantly fewer fans. In an interview, Herman and Chomsky point out this development: '[M]uch of the new media on the internet is oriented toward facilitating social connections, with politics secondary at best, and the best of the new alternative media have limited resources and outreach and specialize in critical analysis rather than news-making'.<sup>35</sup>

The tabloidisation of social media is, however, just a tendency, not a determinism or totality. Social movements often use social media because they are not adequately represented in the mainstream media. They tend to understand how to use online communication as a tool for political organisation well. The capitalist online public sphere is not totally, but predominantly, an entertainment sphere, and only to a lesser extent is it a political public sphere.

*Fourth*, political bots play a role in online political communication. A bot is a piece of software code that performs certain online behaviour based on an algorithm. Examples are automatic tweets or re-tweets or the posting of images and texts from a database at particular times. The problem of bots in political communication is that they can appear human-like, can distort attention, harass and scare people, etc. They are an expression of the online automation of human action, the replacement of humans by machines. There are concrete humans who own, control, and programme bots. So, whereas the political bot does not have political attitudes, morals and interests, its behaviour is shaped by human beings who have particular political interests.

Kollanyi, Howard and Woolley have analysed around 10 million tweets mentioning Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump around the time of the third US presidential election debate.<sup>36</sup> They found that political bots posted 36.1% of the pro-Trump tweets and 23.5% of the pro-Clinton tweets. Given that political opinion and sentiment analysis is increasingly conducted on Twitter and with the help of Big Data analytics, political bots can manipulate the public perception of public opinion. Considering that a certain degree of online politics is automated, political attitudes should probably not at all be measured with the help of Big Data analytics. Political bots, Big Data analytics and computational social science methods can colonise, distort, instrumentalise and manipulate the public sphere.

## 2.4 Flak/Mediated Lobbying

Herman and Chomsky do not properly explain the name of the fourth dimension: Flak. This German term stems from military jargon. The Nazis used *Flak* as an abbreviation for *Fliegerabwehrkanone*. In a comprehensive overview, Joan Pedro suggests to speak of 'countermeasures to discipline the media'<sup>37</sup> instead of flak. We could also simply speak of mediated lobbying attempts.

Herman and Chomsky define flak the following way: "Flak" refers to negative responses to a media statement or program. It may take the form of letters,

telegrams, phone calls, petitions, lawsuits, speeches and bills before Congress, and other modes of complaint, threat, and punitive action. It may be organized centrally or locally, or it may consist of the entirely independent actions of individuals.<sup>38</sup> In the digital age, lobbying for certain interests has been extended to social media and is no longer simply aimed at centralised media organisations, but now aims to directly transmit political messages to as many internet users as possible.

At the time of the 2011 Arab Spring and the subsequent Occupy movements, there was much euphoria about protest and revolutionary movements' use of social media for public engagement and political organisation.<sup>39</sup> After the world economic crisis had started in 2008, it seemed like revolution was possible. The role of social media in revolutions and protests was often overstated. Empirical analysis shows that in protests, social media communication tends to interact with other forms of political communication, especially face-to-face-communication.<sup>40</sup> Revolutions and protests are not virtual, but take place offline and online simultaneously.

Political groups and movements from all parts of the political spectrum utilise the internet and social media for political communication. The example of political bots mentioned in the previous section shows that both supporters of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton used bots for trying to boost their candidate's popularity. Automated lobbying is a particular form of flak in the digital age.

In the early days of the internet, sometimes the impression was conveyed that left-wing and green movements such as the Zapatista solidarity campaigns were very skilled at utilising the internet for political communication because they are grassroots organisations and that far-right groups were very bad at it due to their hierarchical leadership ideology. The basic argument was that grassroots movements as well as the internet have a flat and decentralised structure and therefore are suited for each other. This assumption underestimates the internet's social hierarchies and power structures that are not technically determined. Today right wing lobbying is a large-scale affair on the internet.

In November 2016, Hillary Clinton had 10.9 million Twitter followers, while Donald Trump had 14.6 million. French President François Hollande had 1.78 million followers, the National Front leader Marine Le Pen 1.18 million. In the UK, left-wing Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn had 662k followers, Nigel Farage 516k.<sup>41</sup> The data indicate that right-wing groups and individuals are at least just as active and popular on social media as left-wing activists and groups.

Figure 6.6 shows a typical tweet by Donald Trump. It achieved a high number of likes and re-tweets: More than 7,500 likes and 20,000 re-tweets. The example shows that right-wing politics today to a significant extent takes place online and on social media.

Right-wing lobbying is not limited to established parties and politicians, but is to a significant degree carried by right-wing social movements. The alt-right



**Fig. 6.6:** A tweet by Donald Trump. Source: twitter.com.

movement is a far-right movement that is predominantly active on the internet. It is racist, white supremacist, anti-Semitic, homophobic, anti-feminist, and Islamophobic. It uses social media, internet memes, and right-wing sites such as Breitbart News. Donald Trump has appointed Breitbart's executive chairman Steve Bannon as his White House chief strategist. The alt-right movement uses hashtags such as #WhiteGenocide, #MAGA (Make America Great Again), #ccot (Conservative Christians on Twitter), #tcot (Top Conservative on Twitter), #WhiteSupremacist, #AltRight, #AntiWhite, #WhiteLivesMatter, #WarOnWhites, #NRx (Neoreaction). *The Guardian* has reported that Trump supporters spread fake news stories and conspiracy theories about Hillary Clinton on social media.<sup>42</sup> Empirical research confirms such tendencies.<sup>43</sup> As dialectical counter-pole to the fact that there are fake online stories, one must also stress that fact-checking organisations that work on professionally revealing truths and falsehoods have emerged. They are organisations such as the International Fact-Checking Network.

The Norwegian Nazi terrorist Anders Breivik was quite digitally savvy. He gathered information online, purchased weapons and bomb equipment online, was an online gaming enthusiast (World of Warcraft, Call of Duty) participated in far-right discussion fora such as Stormfront, nordisku.nu and document.no,

gathered more than 9,000 friends on Facebook, and spread propaganda videos with the help of YouTube and Vimeo.<sup>44</sup>

Even if we do not like it, fascism and right-wing extremism on social media are to a significant degree public forms of communication. They constitute a reactionary public sphere that is mediated by the internet, social media, mobile communication, etc. The point is to create a political climate in society that advances democratic and civil public spheres, which is however not just an issue that concerns how we communicate. It is also a political task that needs to aim at overcoming inequality, discrimination exploitation and domination in society. Online fascism is online communication that aims to advance creating a fascist society by spreading hatred, prejudices, authoritarian populism, friend/enemy propaganda, and fetishist political ideology. Right-wing extremism online appropriates certain elements of fascism (e.g. hatred against immigrants and refugees, anti-Semitism, anti-socialism, etc.) in online speech.

In an interview Herman and Chomsky argued that right-wing media, including Fox News, right-wing talk radio and blogs, form 'a right-wing attack machine and echo-chamber'.<sup>45</sup> In the current political climate of nationalism, racism, xenophobia and elements of fascism, social media is certainly a right-wing attack machine. It must, however, also be seen that the political left is skilled at using social media, which maintains online politics as a contradictory space.

## *2.5 Ideologies*

Ideology is a complex term with many meanings that range from individual or collective meanings or worldviews to the notion of false consciousness.<sup>46</sup> The advantage of a critical notion of ideology over a general one is that it allows normative judgements about how a good society looks like. Herman and Chomsky speak of neoliberal ideology,<sup>47</sup> Western ideology,<sup>48</sup> anti-Communist ideology,<sup>49</sup> the national-security ideology,<sup>50</sup> right-wing ideology,<sup>51</sup> and the ideology of national security.<sup>52</sup> But they never define the term. Ideology can in a critical manner be understood as a semiotic process in which humans practice the production and spreading of information, meanings, ideas, belief, systems, artefacts, systems, and institutions that justify or naturalise domination and exploitation.<sup>53</sup> Ideology is the semiotic level of domination and exploitation.

In times of crisis, it is highly likely that all sorts of ideologies are expressed and challenged in public communication. There are both ideologies of the internet and ideologies on the internet. Ideologies of the internet are a form of public communication that fetishises instrumental control of online communication. It is instrumental communication about instrumental communications, a meta-form of communication that justifies and defends the application of

instrumental reason to the internet. Neoliberal ideologies of the internet present the online world as a frontier for investments that create a better world. They leave out questions of inequality, digital labour, class and exploitation. An example is that Google describes itself as showing that ‘democracy on the web works,’ reducing democracy and participation to the issue that ‘Google search works because it relies on the millions of individuals posting links.’ Questions relating to the secrecy of Google’s search algorithm, its monopoly power in the search market, users and employees’ lack of control of its means, etc. are not asked. State ideologies of the internet justify state surveillance, censorship and control of the internet and leave out questions of privacy and freedom of speech.

Britain’s Prime Minister Theresa May said that without advanced surveillance capacities and technologies, ‘we run the risk that murderers will not be caught, terrorist plots will go undetected, drug traffickers will go unchallenged, child abusers will not be stopped, and slave drivers will continue their appalling trade in human beings.<sup>54</sup> Compare this quote to Donald Trump’s tweet in figure 6.6. Both present society as being full of illegal immigrants, criminals, drugs, terrorism, child abuse, slavery, and other dangers. The ideological trick is to first create the impression of ubiquitous danger and to then call for quick fixes by calling for deporting or locking up or monitoring scapegoats, enhancing the use of surveillance technologies, etc. The problem is that there is no technological fix to political and socio-economic problems. Categorical suspicion turns the presumption of innocence into a presumption of guilt so that certain humans are automatically considered terrorists and criminal until proven innocent.

Ideology on the internet is the phenomenon of fascism, racism, right-wing extremism, nationalism, classism, sexism, anti-Semitism, etc. online. Given that right-wing ideology is flourishing in many societies, it is also exceedingly present online and on social media. Ideology on the internet tends to make use of visual means and tabloidisation (simplification, using few words, emotionalisation, scandalisation, polarisation, banalisation, manipulation, fabrication, etc.). User-generated ideology is the phenomenon that ideology production is no longer confined to professional ideologues, but has become possible on the level of everyday life. Ideologies are sensational, populist, simplistic, emotional, and speak directly to particular subjects. Because of these features, online ideology tends to attract a lot of attention. Algorithms reward those who gain significant levels of attention by helping to further amplifying them. Therefore, there is a tendency of *algorithmic amplification of online ideologies*.

The 2016 Austrian presidential election saw a run-off between far-right candidate Norbert Hofer representing the Freedom Party of Austria and the Green Party candidate Alexander Van der Bellen. Hofer’s supporters mobilised especially on Facebook, where they often spread violent threats against Van der Bellen, refugees, immigrants, and others. An analysis of such comments

showed that the important elements of political communication were: (1) authoritarian populism guided by the leadership principle, (2) nationalism, (3) the friend/enemy scheme, and (4) militancy and violent threats.<sup>55</sup>

Herman remarks that the ‘fifth filter – anti-communist ideology – is possibly weakened by the collapse of the Soviet Union and global socialism.’ The situation has again changed since with various Occupy movements, Jeremy Corbyn, Bernie Sanders, Syriza, Podemos, etc., once again putting the idea of socialism on the political agenda. We see both liberal and right-wing mainstream media in Britain waging an ideological war against such people and movements. As an example, a study of journalistic representations of Jeremy Corbyn found that in 89% of 812 analysed news stories, Corbyn’s views were absent, distorted or challenged. Forty-three per cent of all stories ridiculed or personally attacked Corbyn. The study concludes that ‘the degree of viciousness and antagonism with which the majority of the British newspapers have treated Corbyn is deemed to be highly problematic from a democratic perspective’<sup>56</sup>. Another study showed how anti-socialist ideology directed against Corbyn also spread on Twitter and was organised as a red scare 2.0.<sup>57</sup> In the analysed dataset, users for example argued that because of being left-wing, Corbyn is loony, an extremist and dangerous (compressed general ideology), is a friend of terrorists, radicals and dictators and thereby supports Britain’s enemies (foreign policy discourse topic), wants to create a state-controlled economy that will result in poverty and deprivation for all (command economy-discourse topic), wants to create a totalitarian state like Stalin or Mao did (authoritarian and totalitarian politics discourse politics), and is an old, badly dressed, vegetarian, bike-riding loony-left hippie with a beard (culture and lifestyle discourse topic). The foreign policy, command economy, and lifestyle-discourse topics were also prominently featured in the right-wing media. User-generated ideology on Twitter in these cases is closely related to ideologies spread by the mass media. It copies the latter’s contents by linking to articles, using certain headlines or biased phrases such as ‘the Loony Left’ and at the same time feeds these media by showing that there is an interest in and positive response to stories that scapegoat the Left.<sup>58</sup>

But social media and society are not exclusive terrains of the right. There is always the potential for contestation. The same study showed that left-wing activists can challenge ideology by characterising those attacked in positive terms, using satire, humour, sarcasm, provide links and arguments showing the world’s complexity and contradictions, argumentative dialectical reversals. Such strategies tend to be smart, complex, and dialectical.

### 3. Assessment

Table 6.2 summarises the discussion of the online propaganda model.

On the one hand it seems like the propaganda model is also relevant in the online world because we continue to live in a society shaped by class

and domination. On the other hand, the model also needs to be adapted and extended because of particular features of digital capitalism and digital media.

Above we have discussed the role of algorithms that partly automate propaganda in the form of intransparent search and ranking algorithms as well as political blogs. Native advertising and branded content enhance the power of corporations and enable them to displace journalism's autonomy and to present product propaganda as editorial content. A further differentiation that must be taken into account is that in computer networks and on networked computers, the production, diffusion and consumption of information converges. Audiences become users and prosumers (productive consumers). This model is different from the broadcast model of communication. Power asymmetries are, however, not automatically sublated, but further complicated. Another impor-

Dimension	Internet
Size, Ownership, Profit Orientation	Concentrated social media markets, concentrated ownership, intransparent and secret algorithms that determine the priorities of how results and news are presented
Advertising	Transnational corporations are able to confront users with targeted ads and content; Native online advertising and branded online content threaten news-media's-independence; The online advertising-user-spiral increases social media's power in advertising and as news media and advances monopoly tendencies in the online economy; On social media, users' digital labour produces a data commodity and is exploited by the platforms in order to sell targeted ad spaces
Sourcing	Traditional news organisations are powerful actors in online news; Online attention as commodity manipulates political communication; Corporations and entertainment dominate social media attention; Political bots distort the political public sphere
Flak, Mediated Lobbying	Bots and other tools for automated lobbying; Social media use by politicians, parties, movements; Online hate speech
Ideologies	Ideologies of the internet; Ideologies on the internet and user-generated ideologies; Algorithmic amplification of online ideologies

**Table 6.2:** The Online Propaganda Model (PM).

tant aspect is that we should always think of potentials for resistance and study actual oppositional developments.

I find the PM a useful model for the analysis of power structures in media systems, as this chapter demonstrates. But we also need a further refinement and extension that brings us beyond the PM and takes critiques of capitalism, anti-democratic elements of state power, acceleration, etc. into account when analysing media systems. There is a range of topics, such as the exploitation of labour and surveillance, that relates to (digital) media that need to be critically analysed.<sup>59</sup> Wherever there are communications systems in capitalism, there are also workers. And a specific share of them is exploited in class relations. In the production of digital media, there is an international division of digital labour in which we find diverse workers, such as African slave-miners, Chinese hardware-assemblers working at Foxconn, highly paid and highly stressed software engineers, precarious clickworkers and call centre agents, online freelancers, precarious creative workers, social media user-workers, etc.<sup>60</sup> Edward Snowden unveiled the existence of a surveillance-industrial internet complex, through which secret services bulk-monitor users' online activities, which has resulted in concerns about the violation of basic rights. Social media are accelerated, high-speed media. Nobody can read all tweets posted about an important topic. Tweets and online information flow at such a speed that there is no time for real debate and controversy. Postings tend to be short, entertaining, and superficial. Online brevity provokes superficiality and the negation of the world's complexity. Online communication tends to take place in fragmented and isolated publics, filter bubbles, and echo chambers that lack constructive controversy.

All of these problems are not problems of propaganda but of power in general. We therefore need a model of power on social media. It needs to stress various dimensions, conflicts, and lines of potential struggle. For doing so, we also need a model of society. Society is the totality of communicative, social relations that take place in the context of dialectics of structure and agency. An understanding commonly used in sociology is that society and all social systems have three dimensions: the economy, politics, and culture. These are realms for the production of use-values (economy), collective decisions (politics), and meanings (culture). Any particular social system has an economic, a political and a cultural dimension. One of these dimensions may be dominant, which situates this social system in a particular subsystem of society. Table 6.3 shows the role of power structures in society in general and modern society in particular.

The internet and social media platforms are social systems. Power should therefore be analysed in the context of the economic, political and cultural dimensions. Modern society has a capitalist economy that is based on the accumulation of monetary capital. It is, however, according to Pierre Bourdieu, also based on the accumulation of political (influence) and cultural power (reputation).

<b>Dimension of society</b>	<b>Definition of power</b>	<b>Structures of power in modern society</b>
Economy	Control of use-values and resources that are produced, distributed and consumed.	Monetary capital: Control of money and capital.
Politics	Influence on collective decisions that determine aspects of the lives of humans in certain communities and social systems.	Influence: Control of governments, bureaucratic state institutions, parliament, military, police, parties, lobby groups, civil society groups, etc.
Culture	Definition of moral values and meanings that shape what is considered as important, reputable and worthy in society.	Reputation: Control of structures that define moral values and meanings in society (e.g. universities, religious groups, intellectual circles, opinion-making groups, etc.).

**Table 6.3:** Three forms of power.<sup>61</sup>

Accumulation of power is the defining feature of modern society that therefore not only has a capitalist economy but also is a capitalist society. Table 2 therefore also shows the forms that power take on in capitalist society.

Table 6.4 shows a theoretical model of power in digital capitalism.

As mentioned above, this model is based on a theoretical distinction between three realms of society: the economy, politics, and culture.<sup>62</sup> It is also grounded in the philosophical dialectic of the subject and the object that contains three dimensions: human subjects, inter-subjective processes, and objective structures/social systems. Power in class societies is contradictory. It is organised in the form of economic, political and cultural contradiction. Which pole is more powerful under particular conditions is not pre-determined. Those who control resources normally tend to have power advantages. Given that there are structural contradictions, there is always the potential for actual social struggles. These potentials are, however, not automatically realised.

Table 6.4 shows a power structure model for digital society that could also be more generalised for modern society as a whole, for class societies, etc. Herman and Chomsky's PM covers some aspects of the power structure model, especially those that focus on politics, economy, the system, and dominant subject groups.

This chapter has shown that the PM remains relevant for the critical study of the internet, social media, and Big Data. Given the dialectical and historical character of both communications and society, we need to think of subjects, processes, objects, contradictions, the economy, politics, and culture, as well as the interaction of these dimensions, when analysing power in class societies.

	Subjects	Processes	System
Economy	Digital labour (users) vs. digital capital	Exploitation, concentration, commodification vs. common ownership, self-management, commonification	Digital capitalism vs. digital socialism/ commonism
Politics	The Left online vs. the Right online	Political control, propaganda, hate speech, surveillance, algorithmisation of politics, war vs. self-determination, dialectical discourse, humanisation, peace	Surveillance-industrial internet complex vs. participatory democracy
Culture	Everyday users vs. online celebrities and influencers	Stratification of attention, acceleration, tabloidisation, spectacles, malrecognition vs. Equalisation, deceleration, critique, dialectisation of discourse, recognition	Disrespectful society vs. solidary society of mutual respect and aid

**Table 6.4:** Power structures and power contradictions in digital capitalism.

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