

CORPORATE MEDIA MANIPULATION IN THE US WARS: A CASE STUDY OF IRAQ WAR

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Abstract

Media, as a source of information, plays a crucial role in opinion-making and perception-building. During the Iraq War (2003), the media's role was to shape the images of war while propagating specific ideas to influence the people. As a result, the world perceived propagandistic messages that appeared to take the form of fake news. The disinformation campaign was designed to profess the threat of weapons of mass destruction and explicate Saddam Hussein's affiliation with terrorist organizations as a threat to the world. The instantly shared live images, videos, recordings, and pictures across mass media platforms elicited shock, dismay, and disbelief throughout the world. With this insight, this paper attempts to comprehend the role of media propaganda which promoted the agenda of a media spectacle of the US military victory by transforming into a presentation of anarchy that destabilizes the rationale behind the invasion. It also provides an overview of the development of the Iraq War through the lens of the Herman-Chomsky Propaganda model. This model elucidates the role of propaganda in manipulating the opinion of the Iraqi people and how it was used to achieve economic, social, and political advantages.

Keywords: Media, Propaganda, Disinformation, Iraq War, WMDs.

Introduction

During wars, media plays a crucial role as a source of public information, including control of public views and political impacts. It has a substantial influence on the viewpoints of people. With news, they can send messages and information to notify the public about war efforts. It affects in specific ways that define the exploitation of media for war progression or propaganda. Media houses and disseminating messages are the main components of a propaganda apparatus employed during a war. The government ownership of numerous media outlets should be deliberated upon while authenticating the assertion regarding the corporate world. US corporate media is primarily dominated by six-global conglomerates: Comcast, Viacom, Time Warner, CBS, The News Corporation, and Disney. These corporations are not owned or controlled by the government despite their continued presence in the western world. They hold a major share of the print and electronic media in the country, including cable television, airwaves, television, radio, newspapers, movies, video games, and

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book publishing. Only the internet has posed a challenge to this monopoly; however, even internet censors are increasingly capable of disseminating false propaganda and restricting the flow of information by purchasing high-traffic websites and rapidly transforming them.

The US public depends on reliable sources for foreign news, therefore, some prestigious newspapers known as historical newspapers play their part as authoritative sources. US news organizations frequently offer their support to prestigious newspapers while reporting wars and conflicts. Political ideas pronounce that global television networks play a vital role in determining the actions. Accordingly, CNN has broadened its news coverage range by obtaining a new source with its international newsgathering channels, TV stations, and networks. This effect gained recognition when CNN started reporting on the humanitarian crisis in Somalia, which was exacerbated by the Bush administration decision to intervene in Somalia for a humanitarian problem to shield people from the media as CNN was the preeminent actor in world affairs; thus, the US found itself in this controversy. At that time, many scholars described policymakers' loss of direction because of media influence; however, subsequent research cast doubt on the CNN effect.¹

The real issue is to emphasize the role of corporate media in perpetuating the US-led global wars. The image and perception of US corporate media are becoming increasingly contentious. The primary focus of this paper is on how the Iraq War was constructed in a highly contradictory manner by media networks and news sources worldwide. US media outlets labelled the event 'Operation Iraqi Freedom' or 'War in Iraq'.² The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation used the slogan 'War on Iraq', and various Arab news networks referred it to as 'Aggression'. According to Prime Minister, Jean Chrétien, the Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) policies towards the Iraq War were not legal. He further stated that he was not influenced by the statement that Iraq controlled WMDs.³

This research, therefore, provides an overview of the US role in its initial formulation and development of the Iraq War through the lens of the Herman-Chomsky Propaganda model of mass media. US media served as a primary channel for the Bush administration and Pentagon propaganda. The Bush administration significantly increased its ideological campaign to portray Iraq as the leading threat to world peace and prepare the country covered as a long-planned and carefully orchestrated military conflict. These intents were to purge Iraq of WMDs while implementing UN resolutions.⁴ Under the Bush administration, several covert policies were designed to wreck Iraq. This paper also elucidates the role of the most dominant military at that time. With the increased control of the world's oil reserves, various forms of propaganda, both positive and negative, came onto the surface contributed to the destabilization of the global order.⁵

During the last century, conglomerates controlling a wide range of media, and other business interests have expanded manifold. They have an undivided interest in the US political process as corporate media houses. However, the link between private

or independent and state-owned media remains blurred.⁶ Presently, the spreading of media propaganda displays that the Iraq War was preordained. Whereas, the Propaganda model articulates that society and mindset are influenced by various techniques, including propaganda, press conferences, and news stories, to manipulate people's consent for social and political policies, both domestic and foreign. Therefore, corporate media houses reframe governments' intentions and actions. It transforms and changes public thinking and ways to view important concepts.⁷ The role of US corporate media is to propose a wide range of messages and transmit information to a large audience. These days corporate media houses are very open and effective, and it is not easy to stay apart from the news offered by different news channels. Indeed, corporate media has now been considered an investigative and opinion-shaping role. Its biased role towards corporate governance referred to Iraq as a threat and linked it to the September 11 attacks. The invasion of Iraq was explained to the US public by a complex propaganda campaign that followed a think tank's idea for a new foreign policy. The foreign policies were institutionalized narratives that correlate with criticism. They did not classify the confrontation articulated by Saddam Hussein and Osama Bin Laden.⁸

The corporate media houses frequently promote words that reinforce propaganda and anti-democratic elements and address government policy implementation. It appears that media intended to convey the message that the Iraq War was a peace war for justice, positioning US military operations as peace-making efforts against terrorism.⁹ The corporate houses demonstrate language's uncertainty and distress diminishing through repeated usage of similar slogans. Media outlets have established pragmatic arguments and justification to go to war with Iraq. The speeches of President Bush exemplified his double standards by stating that the war with Iraq is for the sake of solidarity; additionally, the media used terms like 'independence' and 'liberation' to explain the purposes of the war and reiterated the same weak clichés repeatedly.¹⁰

Situation before Iraq War

Before initiating a war in Iraq, President Bush manipulated not only the national security framework and pre-existing progressive approaches but also his peculiar role by justifying the invasion of Iraq as a means of restoring Iraqi liberty and deterring Saddam Hussein from human rights violations, as well as the development of WMDs.¹¹ He stated:

Americans are free people who know that freedom is the right of every person and the future of every nation. The liberty we prize is not America's gift to the world; it is God's gift to humanity. We Americans have faith in ourselves, but not in ourselves alone. We do not claim to know all the ways of Providence, yet we can trust in them, placing our confidence in the loving God behind all of life and all of history. May He guide us now, and may God continue to bless the United States of America.¹²

From this point, the framework of the war reveals the developmental effects of communication policies, media controls, and limitations, as well as all information control, that contribute significantly to framing media incorporation.¹³

Media relationship with the military and political and corporate groups enable it to disseminate unlimited propaganda messages through wartime media techniques. The political economy of media associations influences news content and determines the aspects of war declaration. When the initial bombardment on Iraq commenced, President Bush buffed the eloquent situation about the coalition and countries involved through their participation in allied exertion. Despite this, it was a two-party alliance led by the US and UK that dominated the conflict. A sizable number of other states supported Bush's agenda to war against Iraq. On March 19, 2003, US corporate media broadcasted images of ground troops on the Kuwait-Iraq border, ready for attack.¹⁴ The media reaction was 'shock and awe'¹⁵ and presented the war on Iraq as a great military representation, whereas triumphalism referred to the early days of the US bombing and invasion of Iraq.

The bombardment of media houses' live coverage was surprising as loud explosions and exploding spectators painted a different picture. During the Gulf War I, media framed entirely different images;¹⁶ but in the 2003-Iraq War, there were over twenty channels in Baghdad, including Arab channels and television networks, each represented a different perception of the war. Numerous Arab and European television stations reported it as an invasion and illegitimate attack.¹⁷ Donald Rumsfeld claimed that bombing was precise and targeted military objects only. Arab and various global broadcasting networks focused on civilian deaths and presented life-threatening scenes. Arab media outlets adopted a similar strategy of shaping public opinion. These media outlets referred to the perception of war as a 'New War in Iraq', 'Third Gulf War', 'US War on Iraq', 'US Invasion of Iraq', and frequently as 'US Violence' or 'Attack on Iraq'.¹⁸ Some have even called it 'US Terrorism on Iraq'. According to Bernays, the role of Arab media houses to present the war situation was aggressive and hostile.¹⁹

Propaganda in Framing the Iraq War

Media benefits the US in its wars through corporate media houses associated with its economy. Therefore, media coverage of the US attack on Iraq was characterized by control, manipulation, and propaganda tools. The corporate media conform to the US administration philosophy in terms of manufacturing, gathering, and disseminating news to fabricate and develop local and international perceptions. One of the critical functions of the corporate media house is to define and debate what is commonly referred to as 'Agenda Setting and Framing'. The establishment of an agenda is critical for any method of policymaking as media determine which policies should be implemented during and after the war. Chomsky's model of propaganda is defended by the primary theories of international relations scholars. The Propaganda model incorporates several central Marxist tenets, most notably the Marxist belief that news content is determined by powerful elites motivated by economic gains.²⁰ They

argue that media rely on funding and advertising because media corporation elites prioritize commercial values over reproducing informative news. This relates to the Propaganda model; more precisely, the critical theorist argues that mass media enables the ruling elite to promote their ideology through news coverage. Additionally, critical theorists demonstrate how official reports, statistics, plans, and edited sound bites used by media enable power elites to persuade the public. The corporate media coverage of the Iraq War demonstrates clearly that the media does not function as a watchdog for the government, much less during times of war. The subsequent assertion by administration officials that Iraq possessed WMDs was categorically false.²¹

According to Herman and Chomsky, the Propaganda model is a persuasive model used by corporate media houses as an effective mechanism for legitimizing ideas underlying the most prevalent social issues through their activities. The appearance of publicizing is a primary source of capital under capitalist property relations and acclimation to benefit; the elite's power opposes the sources.²² Herman and Chomsky demonstrate through a comprehensive analysis of media coverage of US interventions in Central America and South-East Asia that the media's societal purpose is to inspire and support economic, social, and political agendas of vested groups and their interests that control broader societal agendas.²³ However, Herman and Chomsky asserted that the Propaganda model on corporate media is also applicable to the media in the UK.²⁴ Regardless of the assertion, an underlying public service responsibility is tractable, it is generally subject to control.

Media Lens, a British media organization, highlights the most prominent elements of media organizations.²⁵ Its media alerts expose claims by organizations, such as BBC and the Guardian that they are independent arbiters of truth. The British media's insertion of an Israeli attack on Gaza at the end of 2008 demonstrates a clear direction for Israeli activity.²⁶ In addition, Media Lens exerts that it prevails from both supporters and detractors of the attack. The intentions of Israel were far more violent and had regularly and purposefully sought to eradicate Palestinian and other civilians.²⁷ On the other hand, BBC's refusal to broadcast the Disasters Emergency Committee appeal was all the more synthetic in light of its numerous other applications in contentious circumstances, most notably for Kosovo during the 1999-NATO bombing on Serbia.²⁸ Indeed, the corporate media house establishes a propaganda system for their vested interests.

Iraq War Propaganda

The Propaganda model does not propose a systematic approach to detecting inconsistencies within the corporate media framework, just as numerous individuals have degraded corporate media content and raised concerns about determining the issue of the Iraq War.²⁹ Because those activities are not their sole focus, their adherents frequently provide examples of such distinctions. Allowing a fully worked-out understanding of consensus and conflict is difficult, but unaffected interest on the part

of followers of the Propaganda model sometimes strengthens stories. According to Colin Sparks, the Propaganda model acknowledges the existence of tactical arguments; it is, of course, developed to accommodate some heterogeneity, but it positions unity as the media's normal state.³⁰ The war goals were to defeat the military foundations of Iraq's power, destroy the government of Saddam Hussain, build democratic governance, and then reconstruct Iraq's economy by setting the capacity of the Iraqi military to direct operations and prevent systematically with its overall power and control. Operation Iraqi Freedom has three imperatives, discover and destroy WMDs, avert Iraq's leadership and its connection in the oilfields into the Persian Gulf, and abolish the political and military leadership while restricting damage to civilians and the economic foundation.³¹

The corporate media demands to concentrate on the exceptions when the default fails. It precisely happens because they provide such critical lessons to learn as someone authorized to transmute and democratize existing media regarding the Iraq War. It is not because the mainstream media is constitutionally diversified. The concept refers to a conflict between capitalist elites and the necessity of a competitive market, where different attitudes are displayed.

Manipulating Images and Propaganda

An alternative view is that war benefits the class interests of media houses and corporations. According to Jonathan Nitzan and Shimshon Bichler, war benefits dominant capitals' interests.³² Each conflict they support has a media component that uses specific methods to mobilize an entire country. Radio and film were used for mass exposure during WW I and the live satellite networks and globalized media during the 1991-Gulf War, Iraq War, and Afghanistan War. During the Iraq War, media addressed public issues and presented a diverse array of possibilities. The corporate media houses heightened war excitement during the Afghanistan War, and the country experienced an outpouring of nationalism unprecedented since WW II. Media framed the concepts ranging from 'America under Attack' to 'America Strikes Back' to tempt a military response. Because of this manipulation, successive US regimes utilized military spectacles to further their agendas.³³

On the other hand, Al Jazeera's live coverage of the bombing of Iraq was appalling. While the loud explosions and blasts frightened observers, corporate media portrayed bombing as a potent attack on evil. Arab viewers perceived it as an attack on the bodies of Arab and Muslim people.³⁴ In 2003, over twenty television networks, several were Arab, and various other media companies depicted the war in markedly different ways. Arab countries denounced the invasion as an illegal attack, while corporate media outlets portrayed it as an 'Iraq War'³⁵ and 'Operation Iraqi Freedom' as framing concepts. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation used the term 'War on Iraq', whereas Arab and other global networks declared it an invasion as a means of control.

Concept of Embedding Journalism and Propaganda

The concept of embedded journalism emerged after the declaration of the War on Terror, especially during Iraq and Afghanistan wars. The US strengthened its position while asserted that Iraq had linked to al Qaeda and connected with Osama bin Laden. However, the UN team on the ground could not substantiate such claims.³⁶ Conversely, US media outlets failed to perform their watchdog role, failing to address and investigate the claims of the US military that they were victims of violence. A variety of media outlets fervently believed Bush's claims, and irrational beliefs, such as the assumption that Iraq had WMDs, were prevalent that caused significant damage to the credibility of the news source.

As per estimates, more than 9,000 media personnel representing 2,000 media outlets worked for various government agencies in the US at that time.³⁷ In addition, the cost of setting up a media centre at the US military base in Saliya, Qatar, was over a million dollars.³⁸ For decades, US media battled to win over the US and international public.³⁹ However, this time was particularly difficult for them as they failed to disseminate disinformation and propaganda. Thousands of Americans gathered in US cities to protest the war and called for international discussions and resolving conflict without violence. Despite widespread anti-war protests, the White House announced that it would employ military force to protect the US interests in Iraq.⁴⁰ According to Pier Robinson, more than 900 embedded journalists took part in the conflict under the auspices of the Pentagon, whereas the US military guarded the areas.⁴¹ The deterioration of working conditions of journalists in the war zone was becoming more threatening. The common risks were bombing attacks and the use of small arms against the journalists. Therefore, reporters were permitted to accompany troops but not allowed to interview them without permission. In addition, reporters were not allowed to cross the border until investigated by the military.⁴²

Because of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, a new era of reports, images, and press conferences emerged along with the rise of Rupert Murdoch's Fox News,⁴³ which he used to launch a constant campaign for war. Waving US flag was featured on the top left corner of Fox News,⁴⁴ and a regular airing of 'America's Bravest' was on the screen as opposed to MSNBC, which did not have a flag animation onscreen.⁴⁵ Unlike the Iraq War, where corporate media supported the US administration in manipulating and justifying it, Vietnam War had no media restrictions. The media was permitted to broadcast anything from the war zone. Many Americans protested this war, and others alleged the conflict as a war against Vietnamese independence or intervention in a foreign country. Others questioned it because they felt it required clear objectives.⁴⁶

The Iraq war was neither in self-defence against an armed attack nor authorized by the UN Security Council. Indeed, the war was a widespread propaganda campaign of disinformation. The significant benefits of the war included regime change, expanding US influence, and satisfying the oil and Israeli lobbies. The top

profiteers from the Iraq War were oil field services corporation Halliburton. Halliburton profited \$39.5 billion in "federal liabilities correlated to the Iraq war."⁴⁷ The media coverage also provided a unique war approach. Media houses like Fox News influenced other media outlets, such as CNN and MSNBC, to get into the media race. Media houses adopted the selective stories approach and influenced public opinions by falsifying, misleading, or even manufacturing their mindsets. The literature shows that the US corporate media houses promoted war as the arms industry needed to sell weapons, and private security contractors needed to continue functioning and making money. The prime beneficiaries of the Iraq War were the arms manufacturer, private security contractors, oil companies, corporate media houses, and political think tanks.

Conclusion

US corporate media benefits US administration in its wars for an extended foreign policy agenda, and in reciprocity, get benefits for corporate media houses businesses. They have unimaginable wealth and incredible political influence. They affect legislation, outline the political debate, and support those ideas which serve their interests. These media houses are connected to every quarter of the economy through their merging partners. No communication concept refers to the veracity of media studies and performance during times of war and crisis. In history, every armed conflict has brawled on two fronts: on the battlefield and in the populace's minds via propaganda. Both good and bad media persons are frequently guilty of misleading and publishing false news to their constituents through falsifications, stereotypes, misunderstanding, and even manipulation to garner support and a sense of legitimacy. Thus, media reporting has evolved into a combination of deception, falsification, and manipulation.

Media coverage during the Iraq War took place under administrative, military, and economic influences. Several times, journalists received end of military clemency and were tasked to manage the news. Ideally, journalists assess a situation with professionalism, objectivity, honesty, and commitment. However, the media's effectiveness in war varies with political and economic perceptions through propaganda, falsification, and disinformation. It demonstrates how journalists are chosen and used as propagandists during times of war and crisis. The media manipulation by propaganda tools, therefore, influenced Iraqi society through the controlled news coverage. During times of war, what is said on the enemy's side of the front is always propaganda, whereas what is said on the other side of the front is always truth and righteousness. The cause of humanity and campaign for peace always dwell on two sides. This is a time to raise questions about the professional standards of media and the objectivity of media freedom. It is concluded that during times of war, media behaviour and practices are referred to as propaganda. The US corporate media completely conform to US philosophy in terms of manufacturing, gathering, and disseminating news to fabricate, condition, and develop local and international public perceptions.

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