

The Case for a Dutch Propaganda Model

TABE BERGMAN

Renmin University of China, China

Media scholars in the Netherlands have largely ignored Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's propaganda model. Nonetheless, this article concludes that the model is germane to Dutch journalism and its current crisis because of the striking similarities between the Dutch and U.S. news systems and content. By focusing on the systems' similarities instead of their differences, this article highlights the influence of the market on journalism on both sides of the Atlantic and offers insight into the PM's international applicability. The article outlines the PM, discusses its increased relevance, and highlights the prominence of the model's five filters in the Dutch media landscape.

Keywords: propaganda model, the Netherlands, Edward Herman, Noam Chomsky, Dutch journalism, political economy, news media

Introduction

Scholars have argued that, from the perspective of stimulating informed citizenship, the news in Europe is more wholesome than in the United States. One often-mentioned reason is the existence of well-funded public broadcasters (Curran, 2011; Cushion, 2012). They are correct, of course. Take the Netherlands. Like most Northern and Western European countries, it has a liberal reputation, certainly culturally (consider issues such as abortion, drugs, and the death penalty) but also politically—at least before the rise of the extreme right in the 2000s. Income inequality is not near the levels in the United States. The mainstream political spectrum in the Netherlands extends relatively far to the left, and the country has a long tradition of public service broadcasting. It would appear logical, therefore, to assume that the news in the Netherlands rarely, if ever, exhibits the fundamental problem that has plagued commercial news in the United States—namely a clear bias in favor of the interests of political and economic elites, even to the extent that American journalism can be said to portray the world in a deeply misleading light (Bagdikian, 2004; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; McChesney, 1999, 2004).

Yet a strong empirical case can be made that throughout the 20th century and up to the present, the Dutch news has been similarly flawed, both during and after the era of partisan journalism, which ended in the 1970s (Bergman, 2013a, 2013b, 2014; De Landtsheer, Palmer, & Middleton, 2002; Hietbrink, Keulen, & Van Voorst, 2010; Rietman, 1988; Roholl, 2008; Ummelen, 2009). Since World War II, the Netherlands has been a loyal ally of Washington. Dutch and U.S. perspectives on economic and foreign affairs largely overlap. The Dutch corporate sector, which is led by multinationals such as Shell and Philips,

Tabe Bergman: tabebergman@gmail.com

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shares Washington's desire for "free markets." In other words, looking at the political economy of Dutch society, one might expect that the biases in the Dutch media run in the same direction as those in the U.S. media. Additionally, as Jürgen Habermas once remarked, it might well be unwise to "harbor any illusions" about a public sphere in which a public broadcaster is present but "commercialized mass media set the tone" (McChesney, 1999, p. 245).

This article, then, argues that a successful model in the U.S. tradition of political economy of the news media—Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's propaganda model (PM)—is germane to the study of Dutch journalism. In fact, its applicability is increasing as a result of the current crisis in Dutch journalism (Bergman, 2013a; Ummelen, 2009). After describing the PM and pointing to its continuing and increasing relevance and applicability outside of the United States, this article examines the current Dutch media landscape for the presence of the five filters. Subsequently, it summarizes existing research that supports the viability of a Dutch PM. Then it shows that the model's second order prediction—namely that the model itself will be neglected in scholarship and the public debate—also holds true for the Netherlands.

The Propaganda Model (PM)

The PM as described by Herman and Chomsky in *Manufacturing Consent* (2002) identifies five filters that distort the news in the United States, perhaps most obviously foreign and economic news, in concord with the interests of domestic political and economic elites. This bias results from concentrated, private ownership of the media (the first filter), the dependence on advertisers (the second filter), the sourcing practices of professional journalism and the orchestrated public relations (PR) efforts of the powers that be (the third filter), the ability of powerful institutions and persons to discipline the media through negative feedback or "flak" (the fourth filter), and the prevailing ideological climate (the fifth filter), which includes anticommunism during the Cold War and pro-market ideology and arguably the "war on terror" since then (Pedro, 2011a & b). Through the study of "paired examples"—simultaneous events such as elections and massacres that are similar except that some are organized or perpetrated by friendly governments, often with Washington's support, and others by enemy governments—Herman and Chomsky show that the American media consistently privilege state and corporate narratives in explaining the world, despite much evidence from more independent sources (e.g., human rights organizations) that provide a very different and more compelling description and explanation of events.

In Herman and Chomsky's ironic terminology, the media focus on and humanize "worthy victims," those who are on the receiving end of crimes perpetrated by official enemies, at the expense of "unworthy victims," the people whose lives are destroyed in the maintenance of U.S. power. The media stick closely to official explanations and points of view. Alternative views are filtered out and marginalized; the media set the limits of debate and overwhelmingly reflect only the discussions that rage among supposedly credible sources: political and economic managers (Klaehn, 2002a, 2008; Pedro, 2011a & 2011b).

The PM's merits have often been debated (Corner, 2003; Entman, 1990; Herman, 2000; Herring & Robinson, 2003; Klaehn, 2003a, 2003b, & 2009; Klaehn & Mullen, 2010; LaFeber, 1988; Lang & Lang, 2004a & 2004b; Pedro, 2011a & 2011b). Therefore this article does not extensively review the PM. Instead it emphasizes that the model's conclusions are hardly controversial within academia, even though the model itself remains marginalized (Jensen, 2010; Mullen, 2010b; Robertson, 2011). Much research

exists that, explicitly or implicitly, supports the model, especially for the United States but also for other Western countries (Klaehn, 2009; Mullen, 2010a) such as, for example, Canada (Klaehn, 2002b & 2005), Spain (Sierra & Vázquez, 2006), and Britain (Goss, 2013).

Eric Herring and Piers Robinson (2003) argue that noted U.S. scholars such as Daniel Hallin (1989) and Lance Bennett (1990) consider the coverage of foreign events in the U.S. media to be flawed in ways similar to those described by the PM:

The standard liberal myth of the news media in the West—that it is independent of elite interests and provides the people with the information necessary to ensure that they can hold elites and in particular governments to democratic account—is rejected widely by academics who study the news media and US foreign policy . . . the most common and empirically substantiated perspective is that, with respect to coverage of US foreign policy, on balance, the US media serve elite interests and undermine democracy. The media do this by portraying the world in a way that tends to shape the perspective of those entering the political elite, generate public consent for or at least acquiescence to US foreign policy and make it difficult for the public to have access to information necessary to challenge the interests of the elite. (Herring & Robinson, 2003, pp. 554–555)

In recent years, journalism worldwide, including in the Netherlands, has been deeply and negatively affected by a range of developments: increased emphasis on the bottom line, media concentration, budget cutbacks both in commercial journalism and public broadcasting, and the rise of digital technologies. These developments would lead one to suspect that the PM now provides a *more* salient explanation of media performance than when it was introduced at the end of the Cold War, because the influence of the market on journalism has undoubtedly increased, and the Internet has not made good on its promise of spawning an effective public sphere to counter commercial media (Goss, 2013; Herman, 2000; Herman & Chomsky, 2002; McChesney, 2013; Mullen, 2009; Pedro, 2011a & 2011b; Winter, 2007).

Applying the PM Outside the United States

The applicability of the PM to countries other than the United States is a contested issue, even among the model's supporters (Pedro, 2011b). A number of scholars, including John Corner (2003)—in debate with Klaehn (2002a, 2003b)—Jeff Goodwin (1994), and Collin Sparks (2007) have raised the possibility that the PM only explains U.S. news because other countries have different political and media systems. For instance, national-socialist and social-democratic parties have had very little sway in the United States, as opposed to their influence in many European countries. The range of established political parties is wider in Europe; therefore its media content too can be expected to be ideologically more diverse. The United States has a weak tradition of public broadcasting, again as opposed to that of European countries. Differences in regulatory regimes and in the “range and profile of the press system” (Corner, 2003, pp. 367–368) might diminish the relevance of the PM outside the United States—diminish perhaps, but not eradicate (Goss, 2013; Robertson, 2011). As Joan Pedro writes,

In the United States, as the hegemonic center of the world system where capitalism and the mechanisms of power are more developed, the influence of [the] filters is greater, but in other countries with similar characteristics, this influence is also evident. (2011b, p. 1909)

The following discussion of the Dutch media landscape, ordered by the five filters, aims to show the validity of that statement for the Netherlands.

The First Filter: Ownership

The Press

The PM's "crucial structural factors derive from the fact that the dominant media are firmly embedded in the market system" (Herman, 2000, p. 102). Therefore, the first filter, ownership, is the most important. At first glance one might assume that this filter, and also the second one, the reliance on advertisers for funding, are hardly germane to the Netherlands, with its strong tradition of public broadcasting. Yet a closer look reveals that the Dutch media are deeply entrenched in the market. With the exception of the public broadcasting organizations, the Dutch media too "are profit-seeking businesses, owned by very wealthy people (or other companies); and they are funded largely by advertisers who are also profit-seeking entities, and who want their advertisements to appear in a supportive selling environment" (ibid.).

The Dutch print media are privately owned and the newspaper industry is highly concentrated. With a combined share of 80%, three corporations dominated the regional and national newspaper markets in early 2013. The publicly traded Telegraaf Media Groep (TMG) is the largest publisher with a market share of 37% (Dutch Media Authority, 2013, pp. 61–62). TMG owns the country's most popular newspaper, *De Telegraaf*, and the free papers *Spits!* and *Metro*. They are the fourth and second largest newspapers, respectively. Much of their content consists of copy provided by the leading Dutch news agency, ANP. According to journalists working at the papers, PR material is a "very important" (Prenger, Van der Valk, Van Vree, & Van der Wal, 2011, p. 3) resource too. TMG also owns five regional newspapers, the largest producer of online videos, and several magazines and radio stations, including the popular Sky Radio (Dutch Media Authority, 2013). With about one-third of TMG shares in its possession, the Van Puijenbroek family is in control of the group. The family also owns textile producer Van Puijenbroek Textiel, which has been a steady supplier of the Dutch army since 1925 (Van Amerongen & Brouwer, 1995).

The second biggest newspaper publisher in the Netherlands, the publicly traded Mecom, is controlled by British insurance companies and investors. Mecom owns nine regional papers and controls 23.5% of the combined national and regional markets. It also owns media in Denmark (Dutch Media Authority, 2013). The third biggest newspaper publisher is De Persgroep NV, a Belgian company wholly owned by the Van Thillo family, which amassed a fortune through banking and colonial exploitation in the Congo. The company publishes newspapers and magazines in Flanders and holds a 50% stake in the biggest owner of commercial radio and television stations in that Belgian region. In the Netherlands, De

Persgroep NV owns the national papers *Trouw*, *Algemeen Dagblad* (including its many regional editions), and *de Volkskrant*. It also owns the local Amsterdam paper *Het Parool* and a radio station (ibid.).

As a result of economic hard times, revenue from advertising has dropped precipitously. The online versions of papers attract many visitors, but are hardly profitable. In the first decade of the 21st century, 5,310 jobs were lost in the Dutch newspaper industry. In 2010, the industry still provided work for 8,570 people (Rutten & Slot, 2011). Editors-in-chief have more and more become adjuncts to the publisher, partly as a result of the pressures arising from the dire financial situation of newspapers. This means that the business side has won in influence at the cost of the editorial side, with the inevitable result that market considerations have even further infiltrated the daily practice of journalism (Blokker, 2010). Yet the press remains largely unregulated. Media policy in the Netherlands has been an exercise in modesty, as Jo Bardoel (2003) put it, due to freedom of the press concerns and because an ideological consensus on the issue has been lacking. Policy can be characterized as somewhere in between the Anglo-American reticence to disturb the market and the more interventionist attitudes prevalent on much of the European continent.

In summary, the Dutch newspapers are securely in the hands of domestic and especially foreign elites who are legally obliged to strive for maximum profit. The newspaper sector is highly concentrated.

The News Agencies

The situation regarding the news agencies in the Netherlands is unique. The two agencies, ANP and Novum Nieuws, are both privately owned and managed for profit. In all other European countries, a national news agency exists, which is controlled by media companies. No other European country has two news agencies that are in competition with each other. In about half of all European countries, the national news agency receives direct or indirect state subsidies or the newspaper industry receives substantial state support, but not in the Netherlands. It is estimated that worldwide about three in four news agencies receive direct or indirect state subsidies (Rutten & Slot, 2011).

In 2003, the private equity firms NPM Capital and Gimv acquired a majority stake in the ANP. Four years later, they bought the remaining shares from the newspaper publishers. As one observer noted on the site for professional journalists, *villamedia.nl*, the ANP formed a "perfect communication link between the multifaceted interests of NPM Capital and the outside world." He also noted that the ANP is very much aware that it is in the business of producing profits (Dukker, 2010, paras. 13–14). The agency has increased its output in text and images by 40% (Rutten & Slot, 2011), whereas the number of editors and reporters has been reduced in order to cut costs (Vermaas & Janssen, 2009). It is indeed remarkable that the agency has retained its reputation of independence and objectivity (Dukker, 2010).

The foreign news that the ANP disseminates originates from other Western news agencies. In the global news flows, Euro-American dominance is overwhelming, albeit perhaps diminishing, and the ANP is part of that dominance (Boyd-Barrett, 2000). It might be expected that its content suffers from a pro-Western bias. A procorporate bias might also be expected. The ANP does not just deliver news to the media but also to corporations like Shell and Fortis Bank (Vermaas & Janssen, 2009). In addition, the ANP

teaches businesses how to write press releases (Rutten & Slot, 2011). In 2010, the ANP was taken over by V-Ventures, the investment branch of commercial broadcaster Veronica.

The second news agency, Novum Nieuws, started in 1999 and has conquered a small segment of the market (Rutten & Slot, 2011). The agency focuses on providing entertainment news and radio bulletins. Novum's foreign desk translates and edits copy from the Associated Press. Twenty jobs were lost in 2008, but the agency regained ground thereafter (Rutten & Slot, 2011). The competition between ANP and Novum has had at least one effect: The ANP now also produces entertainment news (Rutten & Slot, 2011; Vermaas & Janssen, 2009).

The conclusion is clear. As the news agencies are privately owned and run for profit, one would expect that their case, at least the PM, is germane to the Netherlands, in fact, more so than in many other countries including the United States.

Broadcasting

The foremost expert on Dutch broadcasting, Jo Bardoel (2008), has summed up its historical development:

The Dutch system of "segmented pluralism," in which social groups and civil society play a vital role represents an interesting alternative to media systems relying mainly on either the state or the market. But at the beginning of a new century, this unique Dutch model is eroding rapidly and is starting to resemble a more European or even global media model in which liberal policies and commercial media markets dominate. Over the past two decades the Dutch media have changed almost completely, and public information has shifted from a merit-good to a market commodity, mainly as a result of liberalizing national and European broadcasting and telecommunications policies. Consequently, the Dutch television sector has become increasingly internationalized. (pp. 199–200)

Policies promoted by the European Commission (EC) have resulted in private interests increasing their influence on the formulation of public broadcasting strategies. The interests of stakeholders other than private media companies are underrepresented. The EC's

multi-stakeholder policy practices are far from inclusive and fail to meet several aspects of deliberative democracy. Essentially, they have been created in response to market pressures (and, hence, over-focus on market questions) and rarely take as their starting point the improvement of public service broadcasting as a democratic policy project. (Donders & Raats, 2012, p. 162)

The television market is, just like the newspaper market, dominated by three players: public broadcasting the German media behemoth Bertelsmann, and the Finnish Sanoma group. Together they control almost 90% of the national market (Dutch Media Authority, 2013). Bertelsmann owns the RTL channels in the Netherlands through the RTL Group, which holds interests in dozens of television and radio

channels throughout the world. Sanoma owns the SBS channels in the Netherlands. Thus, most of the television broadcasting industry is owned by two foreign corporations and run for profit.

The presence of public broadcasting organizations with a market share of about one-third poses the strongest challenge to the PM's application to the Netherlands. Following Alex Doherty's revision of the model to incorporate the BBC and thus make it relevant to the study of British media, the argument here is that Dutch public broadcasting too "is not free at all, but is merely subject to different forms of control" (Doherty, 2005, para. 9). The public broadcasting organizations might not be profit-seeking enterprises, but of necessity they have been much preoccupied with cost saving, especially of late. They too are victim of the "commercial logic" of cost saving and output maximization (Davies, 2009). The commercial context they operate in has overwhelmed and neutralized them.

The people leading the public broadcasting organizations hail from elite sectors of society. For example, those in charge of the social-democratic broadcaster VARA hold such other jobs as lawyer or professor, or occupy a leading position at an environmental group, a publisher, or a pension fund, according to the VARA website. Some are involved in one capacity or the other with the social-democratic party Partij van de Arbeid (PvdA), for instance by occupying a seat in the Dutch senate. Regarding the BBC, Doherty (2005) observed, "For the most part, the members of the board are drawn from a narrow elite sector of society with intimate links to government and big business" (p.). This goes for the Netherlands too. The main difference with Britain is that the Dutch state has no say in who gets appointed to lead the broadcasting organizations. Yet judging from the composition of its leadership, one would not expect VARA to challenge the fundamental premises of Dutch economic or foreign policy. The same goes for the other public broadcasting organizations.

The daily public news shows, the *Journaals*, are not produced by the broadcasting organizations but by the NOS. The NOS is publicly funded but independently run. It has a statutory obligation to produce news in the public interest (Bardoel & D'Haenens, 2008). Nonetheless, the *Journaals'* news is hardly distinguishable from its sole commercial counterpart, RTL Nieuws. Aside from some real differences, there were "striking similarities" between the way the NOS and the commercial news reported on the parliamentary elections in 1994 and 1998, according to Cees Van der Eijk.

Both reacted to the parties rather than trying to initiate news stories, and both devoted considerably more time to the "hoopla" and "horse race" aspects of the campaign than to the discussion of . . . policy or issues. In addition, both paid considerably more attention to the larger parties than to the smaller ones, and both focused heavily on the . . . leaders of the parties. (Gunther & Mughan, 2000, p. 325)

On the whole, the commercial stations have failed to do good journalism. In fact, for the most part, they have failed to do journalism at all. Only the channel RTL4 broadcasts a daily news show, RTL Nieuws, which is more or less well regarded. The other channels produce no serious daily news show and hardly any other programs that might be termed journalistic.

Dutch public television since the 1970s has operated on a hidden commercial logic (Bergman, 2013b). With the advent of commercial television in the Netherlands in 1989, the pressure on public broadcasting to be mindful of ratings has undoubtedly increased even more. Even public current affairs programs pay a lot of attention to ratings. When discussing who to invite, the editors of the leading political talk show *Buitenhof* always consider how a prospective guest did in the ratings the last time around (Luyendijk, 2010). In short, Dutch public broadcasting has not been able to resolve the "core dilemma" of public broadcasters everywhere: their relationship to the wider capitalist political economy (McChesney, 1999).

With a combined share of more than 80%, the national radio market is controlled, yet again, by three big players: public broadcasting the Telegraaf Media Groep (TMG), and Talpa Media (Dutch Media Authority, 2013). TMG is also the dominant player in the newspaper industry. In the mid-20th century, radio was still the "quintessential family medium," but in the 21st century radio has devolved into the ultimate "target audience medium," obsessed with "formats, target groups and market shares" (Bakker & Scholten, 2009, p. 88).

The Second Filter: Advertising

The Dutch press depends on advertising revenue to stay afloat in the market place. The second filter therefore applies to the press and of course to the commercial broadcasters. But it also applies in part to the public broadcasting organizations. Although the majority of the funds that they operate on are public funds, they receive about a quarter of their budget from the revenue of the commercials they air (Dutch Media Authority, 2013). The negatives that Herman and Chomsky have identified with an advertising-supported media system therefore also apply to the Dutch media. As Herman and Chomsky (1988) wrote, "With advertising, the free market does not yield a neutral system in which final buyer choice decides. The *advertisers'* choices influence media prosperity and survival" (p. 14; emphasis in original). For instance, the social-democratic newspaper *Het Vrije Volk* was dismantled in the 1970s partly because it could not generate enough ad revenue, analogous to the fate of the *Daily Herald* in Britain (Bergman, 2013a; Herman & Chomsky, 1988). It can come as no surprise that the Netherlands has no labor papers anymore. Advertisers prefer to avoid advertising in papers that are critical of capitalism.

The Third Filter: Sourcing

Commercial media prefer "a steady, reliable flow of the raw material of news" (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, p. 18), with the result that journalists spend much time at press conferences and other pseudo-news events orchestrated by official and corporate sources, which on the whole are deemed reliable. The third filter, sourcing, is also germane to the Dutch situation. Institutional sources are prominent in reporting (Vasterman & Aerden, 1995). An institutional bias has been documented for the public news programs, the *Journaals*. Philip Van Praag Jr. (2002) condemned the *Journaals* for focusing during election campaigns almost exclusively on the political parties that were assumed to end up taking part in the governing coalition. One would expect that the relatively broad political spectrum in the Netherlands would lead to relatively diverse news, but Van Praag's study indicates that this expectation might be largely unfounded.

A study concluded that public broadcasting leans to the right. From September through November, 2010, 47 of the top 100 guests on public broadcasting talk shows were from the right and only 17 from the left. A similar study in 2008 showed that public broadcasting was “more right-wing” than “generally assumed”; 35 of the top 100 guests came from the right and 28 from the left (Beerekamp, 2010). Right-wing voices are also prominent in the magazine market. Of the four general interest magazines, the business-oriented *Elsevier* dominates the market with a 64% share. The left-leaning *Vrij Nederland* and *De Groene Amsterdammer* together hold about 30% of the circulation (Dutch Media Authority, 2013, p. 74).

Dutch journalism is highly professionalized, with many journalists holding advanced degrees, often in journalism. In other words, the dominant ideology among Dutch journalists, including those working in public broadcasting, is “objectivity.” This conception of what journalism should be is at the root of all kinds of well-documented problems, especially an overdependence on official sources, in part resulting from the need for a reliable news flow that carries a reduced risk of flak. It is an accepted notion among scholars that political reporters and politicians are caught in a symbiotic relationship; they feed off and depend on each other (Bardoel, J., Vos, C., Van Vree, F., & Wijfjes, H., 2002; Luyendijk, 2010). For example, journalists have moonlighted for government agencies, raking in a lot of money consulting and leading seminars or discussions (Bakker & Scholten, 2009).

By the turn of the century, the ratio of PR practitioners to journalists in the Netherlands was about one-to-one, with the former already outnumbering the latter (Prenger & Van Vree, 2003). Since then, the PR industry has grown dramatically. The exact ratio of PR practitioners to journalists is unclear. Extrapolating from the study by Mirjam Prenger et al. (2011), it appears that an estimate of at least three PR practitioners for every journalist in the Netherlands is reasonable. Drawing on the same study, Joke Hermes (2011) estimated the ratio to be five-to-one. Although cross-national comparisons are tricky as a result of different definitions and research designs, it might be noted that in the United States the ratio of PR practitioners to journalists was found to be about four-to-one (McChesney & Nichols, 2010). Lack of clarity about the precise numbers notwithstanding, Prenger et al. (2011) concluded that in the Netherlands the PR industry has gained much power over the last decade, that it is commonly accepted that public relations has the upper hand and that journalists are not autonomous: “Journalism is making itself the mouthpiece of commercial and governmental interests” (p. 141). A Dutch journalist who regularly reported from Afghanistan said of the relationship between war correspondents and government spokespeople that the latter have “won” (ibid., p. 98).

The Dutch government spends hundreds of millions of euros annually on public relations. The precise amount is not known but clearly “politics” has become “marketing” (Bakker & Scholten, 2009). Ministries brand themselves just like Coca-Cola does (Prenger et al., 2011). A report on the future of Dutch journalism expressed concern about the large propaganda apparatus, funded by the tax payer, which the government employs to guide journalism in acceptable directions (Temporary Press Commission, 2009). Video news releases (VNRs)—promotional videos made by governments, corporations, or other organizations that look just like bona fide news reports—are produced more and more in the Netherlands. It is unknown how often they are used (Prenger et al., 2011).

As in other countries, such as Britain (Davies, 2009), Dutch journalists are constantly fighting a losing battle while sorting out the steady stream of government and corporate propaganda, with precious little time left to pursue original story ideas. The domestic desk at ANP receives more than 900 press releases on a typical day. An estimated couple of thousand press releases are sent every day to the Dutch media (Prenger et al., 2011). Many journalists seem to have accepted the PR industry as an immutable fact of their professional life. Although there still exists resentment, especially among journalists toward PR practitioners, the groups are “antagonists no more.” They still have confrontations and differences of opinion, but these are not “fundamental” (Neijens & Smith, 2006).

It is plausible that the PR industry has less influence on Dutch journalism than on British or U.S. journalism. Hijmans, Schafraad, Buijs, and D’Haenens (2011) did not find many traces of PR material in the two main quality papers, *de Volkskrant* and *NRC Handelsblad*. The extent to which the Dutch media depend on PR handouts is unclear (Prenger et al., 2011). The PR practice of establishing front groups, seemingly independent organizations that are secretly funded by interested parties, is rather common in the United States but appears a marginal phenomenon in the Netherlands (ibid.). In *Manufacturing Consent*, Herman and Chomsky made much of the proliferation of right-wing think tanks in the United States since the 1970s that aim to influence public debate. This development has not penetrated the Netherlands to a significant extent.

The Fourth Filter: Flak

Powerful organizations and individuals are well equipped to produce flak—negative feedback—when they deem certain media content objectionable. The regular criticisms voiced by politicians can be assumed to influence Dutch news content. Flak is also exerted in private. Half of the editors-in-chief of the national newspapers admitted that they get calls from politicians and that they on occasion heed requests to, for instance, keep information out of the paper (Prenger, 2007). It is not uncommon for journalists to resort to self-censorship—for example, when a story idea is at odds with the dominant political or ideological climate, when sources show themselves unwilling to cooperate, when a story does not fit the medium’s format, or when politicians or advertisers turn on the pressure (Bakker & Scholten, 2009, p. 326). PR practitioners often resort to intimidating tactics. They regard criticizing journalists as an integral part of their work (Prenger et al., 2011). Journalists have reported attempts by advertisers to influence content by threatening to withdraw their business (ibid.). As to public broadcasting, there always looms the possibility of politicians trying to cut funding if, for example, they perceive the reporting as biased against them (Jensma & Laroës, 2003). Right-wing politician Geert Wilders has pushed for severe budget cuts in public broadcasting, possibly in part because he feels persecuted by what he derisively calls the “left-wing church,” the liberal establishment including the public broadcasting organizations.

The Fifth Filter: Pro-Market Ideology

As to the fifth filter, ideology, there is no doubt that the Dutch media are constrained by the prevailing pro-market climate in the Netherlands. During the Cold War, the media exhibited a pro-American, anticommunist attitude (Bergman, 2013b). Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the dominant political ideology in the Netherlands has moved more and more toward belief in the market as the solution to all, or at least most, problems (Chavannes, 2009). The most dramatic illustration of this trend is the

rise to prominence of Wilders' Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV). Another example is the, perhaps more significant, move to the center (which in turn has shifted to the right) by the traditionally large social-democratic Partij van de Arbeid (PvdA), analogous to Labour's move to the center in Britain in the 1990s.

Journalists thus function in an increasingly neoliberal environment. Commercial media organizations criticize the government's media policy, because public funding for broadcasting is perceived as unfair competition. Frequently at issue is whether the public broadcasting organizations should be allowed to maintain news websites. News shows constitute a prominent but small part of public programming. Many other programs are meant to be "just" entertainment, yet they often promote dubious values, like a consumerist lifestyle. Or they stimulate nationalism, for example, by broadcasting games of the national football team or fawning over the royal family.

Research Supporting a Dutch Propaganda Model

Much research indicates that the PM is a viable model for explaining the Dutch media, especially regarding foreign coverage (De Landtsheer et al., 2002; Vliegthart & Schröder, 2010; Walgrave & Verhulst, 2005). A study found *NRC Handelsblad's* coverage of the first and second intifadas, the Palestinian uprisings against Israeli rule of Gaza and the West Bank, to be biased in favor of the Israeli version of events. The researchers speculated that the bias originated in the steadfast support of the Dutch government for Israel. This appears a plausible explanation because objective journalism depends on powerful, official sources for ascribing meaning to events. Journalists regard it as unprofessional to take a stand that contravenes official sources. The frame that these sources advance will typically be the dominant one in the media too. A clue as to the value of this explanation is that *NRC Handelsblad* was found to be less biased toward the Israeli point of view during the second intifada, perhaps a reflection of the changing political climate in the Netherlands, which is still predominantly pro-Israel but has become more sympathetic to the Palestinian version of events (Deprez et al., 2011).

The same conclusion—that the Dutch media are biased in favor of Israel—was reached by Jacqueline de Bruijn, who in 2002 studied news programs aired on the public and commercial broadcasters. She found that Palestinians typically commit "bloody" or "terrorist" attacks, whereas they themselves "lose their life" as a result of Israeli "actions" or "incidents." Radical journalist Stan van Houcke revealed that Dutch correspondents are guilty of self-censorship in favor of the Israeli cause because they support it or have personal ties to Israelis, or both (Hamelink, 2004, pp. 45–46).

Only one study has replicated the research by Herman and Chomsky for the Dutch media. Lex Rietman (1988), who subsequently became a correspondent in Spain, wrote his MA thesis on the reporting in Western European newspapers, including three Dutch papers, of elections in El Salvador and Nicaragua in 1984. Herman had found that *The New York Times* parroted the U.S. government line, praising the elections in El Salvador as fair and denouncing those in Sandinista-led Nicaragua, while human rights organizations and independent foreign election observers, surely more reliable sources than Washington, reached the opposite conclusion. Rietman concluded that *NRC Handelsblad* and *De Telegraaf* exhibited the same flaws as the leading U.S. newspaper. *De Volkskrant* did a lot better, but its reporting also was significantly flawed. According to Rietman, a possible reason that *de Volkskrant* performed relatively well was the expertise of its then correspondent for Latin-America, Jan van der Putten. Overall, the study

supported the contention that the predictions of what Herman and Chomsky would come to call the propaganda model also hold true for the Dutch coverage (Bergman, 2003; Rietman, 1988).

Other research shows that the coverage of domestic affairs leaves much to be desired. The situation in the local press is beyond dire. Competition has all but disappeared (Dutch Media Authority, 2013). It is common practice that PR practitioners get to see articles before publication, ostensibly to check for factual errors. But often some sort of negotiation ensues that does not restrict itself to questions of fact. Journalists accept many suggestions for "improvements," including changes to quotes (Prenger et al., 2011). A study on the reporting of the 2010 local elections concluded that the press almost completely neglected to delve into the issues. The neglect was so profound that the researchers could not find enough articles for a content analysis. The local papers mostly followed the news agenda set by politicians, publishing (often short) stories based on their proclamations. The researchers noted that the newspapers seemed thoroughly uninterested in the concerns of citizens:

Regional journalism pretends to be the ear and eye of the region. This election study makes probable that the media certainly do not reside in the capillaries of local democracy and that local democracy is hardly supported by local media. Here lies a big challenge for journalism. A very big one. (Hietbrink, Keulen, & Van Voorst, 2010, pp. 48–49)

The subsequent recommendations by the researchers, although well intentioned, can only be regarded as inadequate. They amount to exhortations to do better journalism: Do not let politicians dominate the news agenda, use more and more diverse sources, and so on (ibid., p. 50). Yet most journalists already know what they should be doing. The power structures in which they work as exemplified by the five filters prevent them from acting on their better judgment.

This article shows that the PM applies to the Netherlands, but it should be kept in mind that its efficacy in shaping Dutch public opinion is a complex question, as are all issues of media effects. The subfield of the political economy of the media assumes that the media have important effects on society and people, although it acknowledges that these can be hard to pinpoint. As to the Netherlands, evidence suggests that the population often has taken more progressive positions than the news media. For instance, the newspapers downplayed the issue of racism in the United States in the 1950s, but opinion polls nonetheless showed that the population was highly critical of racism in that country, more so than the newspapers (Roholl, 2008). A solid majority of the Dutch opposed the invasion of Iraq in 2003, even though the press failed to highlight the lack of evidence that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction and praised Colin Powell's misleading speech before the Security Council (Bergman, 2014). Despite these signs of an audience signs, the author has no doubt that the Dutch PM has contributed to the depoliticization of Dutch society by often investing official narratives with enough credibility to forestall collective citizen action.

The Propaganda Model Ignored

The second order prediction of the PM is that the model itself will be ignored in scholarship and public debate, because it repudiates the not-for-discussion assumption that journalism is performing at

least adequately as a check on power (Klaehn, 2002a; Mullen, 2010b; Mullen & Klaehn, 2010; Pedro, 2011a & 2011b; Robertson, 2011). This prediction holds for the Netherlands. A search for "propaganda model" from January 1, 1988, until January 1, 2012, in LexisNexis yields not a single result for the quality newspapers *de Volkskrant*, *NRC Handelsblad*, *Trouw* or the popular *De Telegraaf*. In the same period, *Trouw* and *de Volkskrant* each mentioned "manufacturing consent" in one article. *NRC Handelsblad* mentioned the term in four articles. During that same period, Noam Chomsky was mentioned in 121 articles in *NRC Handelsblad*, in 51 articles in *Trouw*, and in 92 articles in *de Volkskrant*. *De Telegraaf* mentioned him in one article. Edward Herman, the main architect of the PM, was not mentioned in *De Telegraaf*, *NRC Handelsblad*, or *de Volkskrant*. *Trouw* referred to him once. *Manufacturing Consent* was not translated into Dutch.

Dutch scholarship resembles its American counterpart in many respects (Zwier, Beentjes, & Gutteling, 2006), but in American media studies *Manufacturing Consent* has entered the canon (McChesney & Scott, 2004). Not so in the Netherlands. In the *Tijdschrift voor Communicatiewetenschap*, the flagship of Dutch communication scholarship, the model is mentioned in two articles from 2005 until 2012. It is mentioned in three articles in the *Tijdschrift voor Mediageschiedenis* in the same period and in four articles in the journal *Sociologie* from 2002 to 2012. The term "manufacturing consent" does not occur in those three journals, as the online archive shows (see www.boomlemmatijdschriften.nl).

Conclusion

These examinations of the Dutch media landscape and existing research show the PM's applicability to the Netherlands. This conclusion is significant because it highlights the similarities between the news systems in the United States and the Netherlands. From such a vantage point, it becomes clear that the persistent pro-elite bias in news content and the current crises in journalism in both the Netherlands and the United States share at least one main cause: namely the commercial underpinnings of the news industry. Although this article demonstrates the PM's applicability to the Netherlands, and thereby contributes to the debate about the model's relevance outside the United States, it does not fully address the issue of to what extent the model applies. That is to say, only replications for the Dutch news of studies done in *Manufacturing Consent* and elsewhere by Herman and Chomsky could definitively determine whether the pro-elite bias in the Dutch media is (almost) as strong as in their American counterparts. It is possible that the Dutch filters are significantly less forceful, but in the author's opinion this is unlikely. To his mind, many critical and mainstream scholars alike tend to exaggerate the (significance of the) differences between the U.S. and Continental European media systems. Some U.S. scholars do so inadvertently, because they are eager to demonstrate to their U.S. readers the serious problems inherent in commercial media by favorably contrasting public broadcasting in Europe with commercial broadcasting in the U.S. (McChesney & Nichols, 2010). Other scholars, in the act of classifying media systems, imply but do not show that news content on political and economic issues is substantially different in Europe compared to the United States (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Scholars who actively look for differences between countries and their media systems in Europe and North America will surely find them, but a narrow focus on the differences can lead to a myopic view that ignores the strong similarities that make the PM applicable to the Netherlands too.

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