

NEWS VALUES, PROPAGANDA, AND THE MANUFACTURE OF CONSENT

All mass media is ideological in nature and designed with one primary objective—to capture and maintain your attention (for various purposes). The ability to deliver content through a medium’s information channels requires ownership of, or the ability to contract for, the resources necessary to do so. As an ideological mechanism, mass media allows ideologies to be “built up, sustained, and re-iterated” (Mooney & Evans, p. 71). To determine what ideological values are transmitted, though, usually requires an empirical analysis of data.

Mooney & Evans gives us several heuristics to determine information about media content and distribution that could be useful in an ideological analysis. For this assignment, you will collect some of this data from one media source and perform a basic analytical summary of it.

This assignment comes in three parts. Complete each part and assemble it into one coherent document for submission.

1. Choose a media outlet and perform cursory research and analysis

Find a media outlet. It could be a newspaper (print or online), magazine, television channel, YouTube channel, Twitter feed, or any other distinguishable media content pipeline that allows you to find as much of the following information about the source as you can:

- a. Who owns it and how is ownership structured (e.g., private, public, small business, conglomerate)? Is ownership shared? Is decision-making shared? If so, how?
- b. Where and how does it make its money (e.g., advertisers, subscribers, how much, etc.)
- c. Where does it get its news content from? Primary sources? Secondary sources? If secondary, are they primary sources themselves? If so, are they expert primary sources? Or, does it simply pass along received information? If so, from who? What makes the information shareable?
- d. What kind of public and user feedback does it collect (e.g., user/viewer comments, letters to the editor, a direct-feedback mechanism like voting/likes/etc., a complaint line, etc.) Who does it solicit feedback from? Does it block anyone from providing feedback?
- e. Where does it stand on major ideological issues (e.g., *X* must be avoided at all costs; *Y* must be done at all costs). What kinds of information and perspectives are favored? What kinds are not included, and/or repressed?

Write two to three paragraphs about how the above information structures the “manufacturer of consent” for this news source. Focus on what kind of materials the source publishes, how it draws

revenue for this work, and what kind of relationship it has with its audience. Be sure to define “manufacture of consent” in a useful way and apply it as part of your analysis.

2. Read and analyze three articles from your selected media source

Complete an analysis of three articles selected from the media source you used above. For each article, identify which news values (p. 77) you think apply to the article. My recommendation is to discuss all news values you think apply to that particular article and what evidence you can offer for that application. Remember to structure your analysis well.

The news values offered in the text are:

- a. **Negativity** – negative events are more newsworthy than positive ones
- b. **Recency** – the event should be recent
- c. **Proximity** – the event should be close by
- d. **Consonance** – events which can be made to cohere with ideas and understandings that people already have are likely to have high news value
- e. **Unambiguity** – the events should be clear; if there is a dispute or a question there should be some resolution
- f. **Unexpectedness** – that which is not routine is more newsworthy than that which is
- g. **Superlativeness** – the worst or best of something is more likely to be covered
- h. **Relevance** – the audience should be able to see some relevance to their own life in the event
- i. **Personalization** – if something can be reported in a personal rather than abstract way it will be more newsworthy.

3. Your own analysis

In 350 to 500 words synthesize your two brief analyses (From 1. and 2.) above into one coherent analytical summary. While doing so, describe the manufacture of consent in the media source you chose. Use evidence from your analysis about the kinds of news articles that the source publishes and the qualities of these articles that lead to their publication. Be sure to think specifically in terms of the content of the articles, how this content serves the ideology of the medium’s owner(s), and how this ideology connects to a particular audience. Your answer does not need to be “right,” but it should be thoughtful and based on the evidence that you have collected.

This assignment is worth 150 points (50 each section) and is due on Thursday, May 15th by 11:59 p.m. in your Drive folder. It will be evaluated based on your ability to use the terms and ideas of Chapter 4 as part of an analysis of a news source.

Bonus Content: How to Conduct a Basic Informal Analysis

An analysis is, in essence, a study of the structure of something through its elements. An informal analysis of a text is a focused look at one or more of the elements of the text (e.g., the content, argumentation, stylistic design) that follows general critical principles rather than discipline-specific methods. A good informal analysis uses the examination of these features to develop a main idea that addresses a problem, issue, concern (i.e., a gap) that is relevant to the audience of the analysis.

To write an effective informal analysis, you must both read and understand the nuances of a text (or video, or picture, or video game), take generative notes, and then cohesively reorganize your notes around either a known gap (e.g., one given to you), or around an emergent gap (one you discover). You do this by synthesizing the connections and interrelationships of your ideas around a conclusion.

A. Taking Notes

As you prepare to write a basic analysis, you must “read” the “text,” and take notes. If you are inexperienced in writing informal analyses. This will involve the following:

- You must be willing to read and understand what you read by writing your way through this understanding.
- You must be willing to commit time and focus to read closely and track what you have read through your annotations and notes.
- As you read critically and take notes, you must be willing to stop, reflect on what you have read, ask yourself questions about it, and add notes to your existing notes as part of that process (recursivity).

B. Composing Ideas

Once you have completed your close reading of the text to be analyzed, take your annotations and transcribe them into a document. While doing so, you must be willing to consider what ideas are most important to you, and which other ideas are related to that idea (and “speak to it”). As part of this process, you have to find the main idea, or argument, or narrative/story of your own piece that is speaking to you.

- You must have enough notes that you can then produce ideas in sentences to create chains of argumentation (i.e., related paragraphs) to introduce, support, and then conclude a main idea that you develop.
- You must be able to articulate an opinion on the subject you are writing on (an informed opinion), but also try to apply that opinion towards more abstract, or general, ideas.

- Recognize and question your own relationship with the text to situate yourself within it.

C. Finding the Gap

Once you have an adequate base of notes from which to work, you are prepared to draft your analysis.

- Your analysis should be focused on what is missing (in your own opinion) that can be filled in through analysis. This is something that will bridge the “gap” between your own interest and understanding, the text, and the audience.
- As part of your analysis, you may summarize, evaluate, connect, and/or extend ideas from the source text with your own.
- As part of your analysis, you may reorganize the text around conflicting or conflicted viewpoints, contradictions, theses, factual information, or any other content found within the text itself.
- Your own analysis should have an introduction (written last), body, and (brief) conclusion.