CHAPTER 4

Journalism Studies' Systematic Pursuit of Irrelevance: How Research Emphases Sabotage Critiques of Corporate-Run News Media

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1. Introduction

A sociological truism is that institutional structure always has some social consequences. Consider the following examples of institutional structure: a kibbutz (or a collective) organises social life in some ways and not in others, as does a business enterprise. On the assumption that the social sciences seek to understand why society is organised in some ways and not in others, social scientists will have to at least consider the explanatory potential of some institutional structures. Since empirical questions cannot be prejudged, perhaps no institutional explanation will be up to the task of explaining this or that social phenomenon. However, assuming that the social sciences truly seek to understand social phenomena, one would not expect social scientists to refuse out-of-hand to even consider institutional structures as potential explanations for social phenomena. And yet some social scientific fields seem to do just that.

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This chapter deals with one such case. It is the case of a field known as Communication Studies (and more specifically, the subfield of Journalism Studies). Although scholars of communication are no strangers to the institutional explanation of media phenomena, they often exhibit the curious tendency of playing down or resisting such explanations. Interestingly, this resistance does not appear only before these scholars attempt empirical research into aspects of media behaviour but also after the empirical research has been carried out (usually, though not always, by others)[1] and has yielded confirmatory findings.

An illuminating case of communication scholars' resistance to institutional explanations has been previously studied. This is the case of the reaction of mainstream communication scholars to Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's work on media behaviour.[2] Herman and Chomsky offered a formal institutional explanation for the behaviour of the American elite media, known as the Propaganda Model (PM). They hypothesised that the corporate ownership, size and profit orientation of the mainstream media, as well as their dependence on advertisers' money and their reliance on cost-free official sources (alongside pro-establishment experts), would produce a systematic pro-business and pro-government bias in media coverage, when crucial interests of these institutions were at stake. Herman and Chomsky then proceeded to test their hypothesis by analysing the coverage of paired examples of near-identical events with varying consequences for business and government interests, and by assessing the range of debate in the media on several key issues. The media were conclusively found to serve business and government interests when these could be threatened by certain angles and information (which were accordingly excluded from media coverage, played down or distorted).

Mainstream communication scholars reacted to these conclusions with suspicion and hostility. Whereas some of them acknowledged that the specific cases presented by Herman and Chomsky made telling points,[3] they falsely attributed to Herman and Chomsky a series of claims they have never made and committed other logical fallacies.[4] However, evidence suggests that these logical fallacies have also been overlooked by scholars in subsequent mainstream communications studies.[5] The implications of overlooking these logical fallacies for theory and empirical research constitute the story unfolded in the present chapter.

This chapter begins by dissecting research which falsely presented itself as having a bearing on the validity of Herman and Chomsky's work. Next, it follows the trail of scholarly citations to prominent examples of contemporary empirical and theoretical work and analyses its explanatory and analytical validity. These exercises will hopefully illuminate the significance of the documented scholarly practices for the course taken by the discipline of Journalism Studies (a subfield of Communication Studies).

2. Challenging the PM or Simply Bracketing the Business Institution?

An influential study by Thomas E. Patterson and Wolfgang Donsbach sought to document and account for partisan bias in the news. To do so, the authors administered questionnaires to journalists across five countries (United States, Great Britain, Germany, Italy and Sweden).[6] These questionnaires were no regular survey. Rather, they were intended as a quasi-experiment of partisan bias. It should be noted that despite the radical differences between their methodology and that of Herman and Chomsky, Patterson and Donsbach believed their findings had a bearing on the validity of Herman and Chomsky's study, including the PM. Indeed, as will be demonstrated in the following text, Patterson and Donsbach were convinced that the PM was belied by their (i.e. Patterson and Donsbach's) empirical work.

The questionnaires in Patterson and Donsbach's study were so constructed as to detect journalists' political/ideological views, as well as to simulate a series of news decisions, such as the determination whether a particular story was newsworthy, what would be an appropriate headline for it and what would be a fitting visual. Once the questionnaires were completed, the scholars were in a position to test correlations between journalists' ideological views and their mock news decisions. Such a correlation was found. On the basis of this data, Patterson and Donsbach concluded that journalists' ideological views produce a moderate bias in news decisions, with some variations between countries.

Crucially, Patterson and Donsbach have contrasted their findings against previous studies of partisan bias. One of the studies mentioned is Herman and Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent*. As Patterson and Donsbach conclude:

> Gans's perspective [that most journalists hold 'progressive' but 'safe' views]… seems to be more convincing than the claim that journalists serve conservative interests of state and established elites (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). This claim may have some validity when applied to news organisations and their owners but cannot be easily reconciled with the evidence presented here. Journalists are not radicals, but neither are they conservatives. They are best described as a mainstream group with liberal tendencies. Indeed, journalists can act as a partisan counterbalance to the news organisations in which they work (465).

But Herman and Chomsky paid virtually no attention to journalists' individual political preferences, as their view was indeed much closer to the idea that 'news organisations' qua institutions and corporate 'owners' were the genesis of the bias. Herman and Chomsky's study was carried out on the assumption that in a media system which is business-run, the personal views of journalists are causally irrelevant to the nature of media behaviour when crucial systemic or major

corporate interests are at stake, as journalists do not control the media, either individually or collectively. However, for Patterson and Donsbach to acknowledge this crucial distinction between the two studies would be to acknowledge the inexorable power dynamic that obtains between the *business* of news and the *industry* of news,[7] whereby business necessarily constrains journalism's truth-seeking potential and its capacity to engage the public in politics. But this would immediately undermine the significance of Patterson and Donsbach's focus on journalists' individual political views. As it would become self-evident that their research design omits the most crucial implications of the business control over journalism.[8] Although Patterson and Donsbach do mention the business element in passing, they do not regard it as an inexorably biasing force. The reader should recall Patterson and Donsbach's claim that 'journalists can act as a partisan counterbalance to the news organisations in which they work.'

In essence, the quasi-experimental design of Patterson and Donsbach's study creates a reality which is unheard of in the mainstream corporate media. That is, a reality of journalists making news decisions under conditions of perfect autonomy from newsroom pressures and constraints. Moreover, even if we ignore this crucial point for the sake of argument, and we assume that journalists' decisions in Patterson and Donsbach's study were indeed reflective of their actual news decisions and consistent with the ultimate decisions made by editors in real existing news organisations, that still wouldn't salvage their case for a causal nexus between journalists' attitudes and news content. And for good reason. For their case to follow, the possibility that journalists' mock decisions correspond to their actual decisions simply because these journalists were more likely than average to accept the institutional dictates of news organisations, would need to be eliminated.[9]

But, perhaps, the fact that Patterson and Donsbach failed to demonstrate the actual explanatory power of journalists' attitudes vis-á-vis news content does not mean such a demonstration is impossible. As senior researchers David Weaver and Cleveland Wilhoit point out '[...] it would be a mistake to think that individual journalists have little freedom to select and shape news stories, or to change the nature of the news organisations for which they work.'[10] Thus, we would need to look at other attempts to demonstrate the causal nexus between journalists' attitudes and news content.

3. Contemporary Research

3.1 Role Conceptions as Causal Factors

The debate about the causal nexus between journalists' individual attitudes and news content is often cast in the language of 'role conceptions.'[11] Role conceptions are essentially purported social goals which journalists ascribe to themselves in their capacity as journalists, such as informing the public, serving as democracy's watchdog, entertaining the public, etc.[12] Consider how one of the scholarly works citing Patterson and Donsbach – without pointing to the prob-

lems addressed in the previous section – by van Dalen, de Vreese and Albaek, makes the case for the explanatory power of role conceptions in a leading periodical of journalism studies, *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism*:[13]

> Studies of cross-national role conception variation presumes [sic] that variation in role conceptions causes variation in content[…] while cross-national studies of content speculate that content variation is caused by variation in role conceptions [….][14]

Thus, at issue is what causes news content to be the way it is. This has obviously been a long-standing concern of media and journalism studies.[15] Since one major product of the media, on which the public relies for trustworthy information, is the news, it is a high-priority task for enlightened and democratically-oriented scholarship to illuminate the mechanisms behind news products.

Hence, the authors identify an empirical lacuna in the literature which they set out to address: '[...]the study of role conceptions by means of journalism surveys and the study of news content by means of content analysis are generally not combined'.[16] Although Patterson and Donsbach are viewed as one of the 'exceptions'[17] to this disconnect between journalism surveys and content analyses, the reader should recall, once again, that actual news content did not figure at all in Patterson and Donsbach's study. Still, it is worth pondering the question of what the significance would be of combining journalism surveys data and content analysis. In my discussion of Patterson and Donsbach's work, I have remarked that even if the mock news decisions they simulated in their study were found to be consistent with actual news products, it would still be impossible to tell whether one of the variables was causally related to the other, or what was the directionality of the causation. This is *a fortiori* the case with respect to a prospective correlation obtained between journalistic role conceptions and news content, in a study which does not even pretend experimental validity. Thus, a study finding such correlations would be a still weaker case for causal relations, even without going into further detail.

But Van Dalen et al. are mindful of the problem of causation. As they correctly note (citing Donsbach), 'cross-national comparisons do not provide a rigid test for causal relations in the same way as experiments or large N-studies:'[18]

> In this comparative study of roles and content, we search for regularities and 'on the basis of prior research or theory (…) place causal interpretations on those observations' (Jackman, 1985: 172). Studies showing a relation at the individual level are ultimately a prerequisite to explain similar relations found at the macro-level studies. This study therefore builds on journalism studies of the professional attitude–behaviour relation at the individual level and extends these to explain the role–content relation on the macro level.[19]

Thus, the authors acknowledge that their causal account of news content by recourse to role conceptions, is purely speculative. But there is a more

fundamental problem here. Role conceptions are not specific about what goes on in the reporters' minds. They are rather generalised beliefs about broad societal roles journalists ascribe to their own work, such as informing the public, rousing it, entertaining it, etc. There are presumably various different ways of understanding and performing these roles. A journalist uncritically echoing powerful sources and a critical investigative journalist might both see their work as commensurable with the rather broad role of 'informing the public.' But the survey questions – asking journalists to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement on a 5-point scale – posed by Van Dalen et al. were even more general, as they did not capture one specific role conception at a time:

> [...] national politics is newsworthy by definition; [...] mass media should report about national politics in full detail [...] The medium I work for has a specific political colour which guides me in how to do my work;[...] In the news section, my medium keeps a neutral position in partisan or policy disputes[…].[20]

The responses to these rather general questions were correlated against a number of content features of a sample of published news stories. I juxtapose in the following table the above survey items against excerpts from the corresponding content analysis codebook.

Survey Item	Content Analysis Item
National politics is newsworthy by definition; ... mass media should report about national politics in full detail…(910)	Visibility of political news was operationalised as the proportion of stories on the front page which cover national politics (compared to the total number of stories on the front page). Coders coded whether the story was framed in terms of conflict (focusing on disagreement between politicians) (de Vreese et al., 2001) or presented politics as a game (focusing on a politician winning or losing) …(911)
The medium I work for has a specific political colour which guides me in how to do my work;... In the news section, my medium keeps a neutral position in partisan or policy disputes…(910)	The presence of coverage bias was measured by comparing the visibility of political actors belonging to the largest left leaning and right leaning political party The presence of statement bias was measured by comparing the mean tone towards politicians of these two parties. The tone can range from positive (when the emphasis in the story is on the actor's merits, successful solutions, solved problems or abilities) to negative (when the emphasis is on the actor's failures, unresolved problems or inabilities). (911)

Table 4.1: Survey questions versus content codebook in van Dalen et al. (2012).

As should be apparent, the attitude-behaviour parallels drawn by van Dalen et al. are quite problematic. As the authors' own data shows, journalists who think national politics are newsworthy by definition[21] may well decide to use conflict and game frames (913, Table 4.2). The only way in which the use of these frames could be exclusively indicative of journalists' denial of the inherent newsworthiness of national politics, is if journalists could only draw on one criterion of newsworthiness at a time. But this is plainly not the case. Why can't a journalist think politics are inherently newsworthy and simultaneously think the same about conflict or game-like competitiveness among politicians?

In contrast, decisions about the proportion of articles on the front page which deal with national politics may indeed correspond to some news personnel's attitudes about the newsworthiness of national politics, but those decisions typically fall within the jurisdiction of the editor, not of individual journalists. However, by their own account, Van Dalen et al. have surveyed parliamentary reporters, not editors.

Still more problematic are the attitude-behaviour parallels having to do with partisan bias. The survey questions already reveal that journalists are not being asked exclusively about role conceptions, but about the behaviour of their news organisations. This is a tacit, albeit inadequate, backdoor reintroduction of the institutional structure into a study of role conceptions. Consider, once again, the following statement: 'The medium I work for has a specific political colour which guides me in how to do my work.' This is plainly not merely a question about a journalist's attitude or role conception, but also a proposition about the political bent of the news organisation in which she or he is employed.

Similarly, it doesn't follow from the quantitative content measurements which Van Dalen et al. offer that the news coverage is either biased or unbiased. The proportion of coverage afforded each political party can be meaningful only on the assumption that the parties markedly differ from one another on policy issues. If the two parties converge on major policy issues, then an equal level of attention given these two parties in the news coverage wouldn't indicate an absence of bias.[22] It is possible that in some of the countries surveyed the political parties did markedly differ, but no information is provided about an attempt, on the authors' part, to ascertain a meaningful level of political difference between the two largest political parties taken to be representative of both sides of the political spectrum in each one of the countries. Instead, the applicability of the terms 'left-wing' and 'right-wing' to these parties is taken for granted.

But let us assume for the sake of argument that the political parties in each country are markedly different in the policies they promote. Even if one political party is disproportionately represented in one of the newspapers, that still doesn't mean the disproportionality is the result of the political orientation of the newspaper. Indeed, the level of attention afforded each party may have more

to do with the party's or party members' conduct, than with the newspaper's political bent. Unless the specific conduct of political parties is held constant, the claim of bias in cases of disproportionate attention remains speculative.[23]

Relatedly, the analysis of the tone adopted toward political actors has apparently much more to do with the behaviours of political actors than with the intentions of journalists (even if we assume they are the ultimate shapers of content). If politicians, either from the self-identified left or from the self-identified right, act egregiously, it is their behaviour rather than the political bent of news personnel/news organisation that would account for the positive or negative tone. Only by controlling in some manner for the potential variance in the behaviours of politicians could van Dalen et al. hope to document bias. But this was not the route taken.

3.2 Non-Causal Role Conceptions

But not all role conception research presupposes the explanatory power of role conceptions. Mellado and Van Dalen[24] have begun in recent years research into the gap between role conceptions and news content. Although this research rightly questions the direct causal relationship between role conceptions and news content, it uses an equally problematic methodology as studies which presupposed such an influence. Combining general survey questions with a similarly general content analysis codebook, this research seeks to measure the discrepancy between the survey data and the content analysis data. And indeed, it finds such gaps.

Thus, for instance, one of the most (apparently) dramatic findings is that journalists' ratings of the importance of the watchdog role do not jib at how much criticism their actual coverage directs toward politicians, businessmen and other groups.[25] Leaving aside that it is easy for journalists to exaggerate their commitment to the watchdog role (what could at least partly account for the gap) and that the amount of criticism toward various actors may depend on the realities of the studied country (e.g. researchers would have to control for the potential confounding variables of the incidence of egregious government and business practices), even a hypothetical alignment of a journalist's watchdog role conception with his or her actual news content would not indicate the journalist is free to act as watchdogs, which is how Mellado and Van Dalen interpret their findings. As they write

> […]the results of this study confirm the view of scholars who argue that a disconnect between roles and content is inevitable, since journalists lack sufficient autonomy to live up to their ideals.[26]

Although the argument itself is essentially correct, it does not follow from the study's findings. And for relatively simple reasons. Beyond the trivial distinction

between correlations and causality (i.e. role conceptions being correlated with news content wouldn't suggest they cause news content), there is also the somewhat less obvious matter of the systemically innocuous character of the kind of criticism that Mellado and van Dalen's content analysis captures. Consider the following codebook items:

> Act as watchdog of business elites: Questioning de facto powers (the journalist): By means of statements and/or opinions, the journalist questions the validity or truthfulness of what individuals or groups in power say or do; Act as watchdog of political parties; Questioning de facto powers (the source): Questioning of individuals or groups of power through quotes, statements and/or opinions given by someone other than the journalist.[27]

On occasion, businesses attack one another and quite often attack the government. News businesses are no exception.[28] Yet per Mellado and Van Dalen's content analysis these instances would register as the realisation of the watchdog role. Thus, while journalists may be doing wittingly or (more likely) unwittingly their publishers', editors' or advertisers' bidding, journalism scholars sympathetic to Mellado and Van Dalen's empirical operationalisation would regard them as fully autonomous from extraneous influences. The fact that these are hypothetical scenarios does not detract from the validity of the critique, because Mellado and van Dalen take their study to be indicative of reporters' level of freedom.[29]

Thus, unlike Herman and Chomsky who posit rather neatly delineated explanatory variables[30], and conclusive content-based evidence of media bias, Van Dalen et al. and Mellado and Van Dalen provide thoroughly murky variables, including uninformative content data which is simply *assumed* to be indicative of bias and journalists' level of freedom.

News Practices

So far, we have seen that the study of role conceptions diverts scholarly attention away from the power realities of journalism. But this is only half the story. The ascription of explanatory power to and excessive focus on journalists' 'role conceptions' are not the only ways in which mainstream scholars conceal the institutional realities of journalism. Instinctively suspicious about institutional explanations, the literature tends to lionise the scholarly interest in journalists' institutionally de-contextualised everyday routines and practices.

In a recent volume co-edited by Wolfgang Donsbach, who has passed from the scene in the meantime, a prominent media theorist by the name of David Ryfe, announces that the study of institutional sources of power which shape journalistic practices is passé.[31] How he arrives at this conclusion, though, ought to be

retraced, if we are to understand the contemporary mode of reasoning about 'news routines' and 'news practices' among mainstream journalism scholars.

Ryfe begins by situating his discussion between two waves of Journalism Studies research. A first wave of ethnographies from the 1960s and 1970s which, according to Ryfe, contend that 'news is best explained as an outcome of organisational and economic pressures.'[32] And a second wave of ethnographies from the 1980's and 1990's finding that

> [...] reporters constantly argued about which routines applied in what context, and even about how to perform a given routine. They took from this finding that reporters have far more latitude to interpret routines—over and against organisational and economic pressures—than the earlier work implied.[33]

Ryfe takes the significance of this debate to be anchored in 'a series of severe economic and symbolic disruptions'[34] which journalism faces today. For Ryfe, at issue here is 'whether and the extent to which journalists can adapt their routines.'[35] A few pages later Ryfe clarifies the severity of the crisis facing journalism and what he means by his reference to journalists' ability to adapt:

> From roughly 2006 forward, the advertising revenue generated by American newsrooms (which employ the great majority of working journalists) began to plummet. With it went jobs. In the 7 years between 2006 and 2013, roughly 30% of American journalists were laid off or took buyouts. Today, revenue generated by American newspapers sits at levels last seen in 1950, and newsrooms are as small as they have been since 1980. This crisis is not as acute in other Western societies. But journalism across the industrialised world is losing readership and viewership, losing revenue, and losing workers.
>
> The crisis in journalism has galvanised scholars to take renewed interest in news production. For the most part, they have sought to understand how journalists are responding to the technological and economic changes facing their industry.[36]

These passages are curious ones. The first paragraph cited above depicts the crisis of journalism in lucid and informative institutional terms: plummeting advertising revenues, layoffs and buyouts. Moreover, newspaper revenues are said to be at the level of the 1950s. Obviously, these institutional processes do not substantially depend on journalists' choices under current power relations. Journalists do not decide on their news organisation's revenue, on whether they are going to keep their jobs or on the company that owns or acquires the news organisation in which they are employed. Thus, so far, Ryfe seems to be cognisant of the fact that journalists are not the agents behind or drivers of the developments he describes. But then the second paragraph (cited above)

reveals that mainstream scholars of journalism have been primarily concerned with how *journalists* respond to these changes. Not with trying to explain why these institutional changes occurred in the first place. Be it as it may, I take Ryfe's general description of Journalism Studies' scholarly emphases to be robust and accurate. But Ryfe has additional theoretical insights to contribute.

Ryfe qualifies the earlier statement that the ethnographies of the 1960s and 1970s saw 'news' as 'best explained as an outcome of organisational and economic pressures.' Instead, he now argues:

> Most of this early literature understood that reporters had some degree of flexibility in adapting their routines to circumstance. For instance, Tuchman ...calls news routines 'typifications' as a way of allowing that they 'leave room for a great deal of reportorial flexibility.' In a similar vein, Gans ... refers to routines as 'considerations' that reporters take into account when deciding which stories to run and how to report them.[37]

Only that now Ryfe notes that this earlier work also didn't include evidence of as much uniformity (in journalistic routines) as the authors of this work had implied.[38] Ryfe suggests that the uniformity was 'implied' by such phrases as 'organisation men' and 'manufacturing the news'[39] (in Fishman's work).

However, Ryfe makes clear that the said 'uniformity' is, in any event, not the consequence of power inequalities within the news organisation or the news business, but of mere consensus among journalists: 'According to this literature, reporters share a largely implicit consensus about how to report the news.'[40] But if reporters merely share a consensus why can't the consensus simply change if reporters (collectively, if not individually) wish it to change? Why does such uniformity limit journalists' 'latitude'?[41] This set up reveals the false dichotomy, in Ryfe's rendering, between flexibility and uniformity. Both concepts are consistent with a journalism unmarred by hierarchical power relations.

Political Economists of the media, however, reached rather different conclusions about the same literature. As Herman and Chomsky write about Gans, he '[...]greatly understates the extent to which media reporters work within a limiting framework of assumptions' (F2 332-333, citing specific statements from Gans's book).[42] Similarly, McChesney has referred to Fishman, Tuchman and Gans's research as work which

> tended to accept the dominant institutional arrangements as a given. The institutions were unassailable, and the work tended to concentrate upon newsroom organisation, professional practices, and the implications for content.[43]

A major assumption in Ryfe's resistance to a power analysis of journalism is the claimed usefulness of what he calls 'practice' theories, which recent prominent studies of journalism have presumably demonstrated.[44] The term 'practice

theories' is a reference to a collection of ideas by several theorists whose work is 'designed to overcome the conceptual impasse'[45] between structure and agency.[46] Here are some of the tenets Ryfe draws from 'practice' theories:

> Within practice theory, routines are *properly* understood not as expressions of external pressures on journalists (whether understood as organisational, political, or economic pressures)[…][47] (emphasis added).

And once again,

> […] there is no need to impute a structure to social action (economic, political, or otherwise) beyond the conditions of practice (132, emphasis added).

Thus, for Ryfe, the idea that structure has anything to do with practice is invalid a priori. There is no need to admit structure into the explanatory calculus. Instead, it should be enough – or so Ryfe would argue – to meticulously document the details of how reporters cope with their changing economic and technological environment.

4. Conclusion

I have argued that the aversion of mainstream journalism scholars to the analysis of journalism in terms of institutional structures expresses itself not merely in particular dogmas, but also in scholarly practices and emphases, both in the kinds of methodologies adopted and in the data which is deemed meaningful. Specifically, I have provided examples of how mainstream scholars drew on journalists' political beliefs, journalists' conceptions of their own professional roles and newsroom practices, to obscure the power relations in journalism.

I tried to illustrate the severe analytical and methodological problems inherent in this scholarly work. Thus, I have noted the tendency to construct research designs which eliminate or obfuscate the hierarchical relationship between the business side and the production side of news, the unsatisfactory quality of the evidence used to infer the general features of the news content, and the refusal to consider news practices in the context of institutional power mechanisms.

Notes and Bibliography

[1] See note 2. Daniel C. Hallin, for instance, tended to resist the institutional explanation even after his own research lent support to it. See also Footnote 3 for Eric Herring and Piers Robinson's work which provides additional examples of this phenomenon.

[2] Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Book, 1988).

[3] Daniel C. Hallin, *We Keep America on Top of the World: Television Journalism and the Public Sphere* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994). Michael, Schudson, 'The Sociology of News Production,' *Media, Culture & Society* (1989) *11*(3): 263–282.

[4] Edward S. Herman, 'The Propaganda Model: A Retrospective,' *Journalism Studies* (2000) *1*(1): 101–112). Andrew Mullen and Jeffery Klaehn, 'The Herman–Chomsky Propaganda Model: A Critical Approach to Analysing Mass Media Behaviour,' *Sociology Compass* (2010) *4*(4), 215–229.

[5] Eric Herring and Piers Robinson, 'Too Polemical or Too Critical? Chomsky on the Study of the News Media and US Foreign Policy,' *Review of International Studies* (2003) *29*(4) 553–568; Yigal Godler, 'Why Anti-Realist Views Persist in Communication Research: A Political Economic Reflection on Relativism's Prominence,' *Critical Sociology* (2016) 0896920516645935; Andrew Mullen, 'Twenty Years On: The Second-Order Prediction of the Herman-Chomsky Propaganda Model,' *Media, Culture & Society* (2010) *32*(4), 673–690.

[6] Thomas E. Patterson and Wolfgang Donsbach, 'News Decisions: Journalists as Partisan Actors.' *Political Communication* (1996) *13*(4), 455–468. Unless stated otherwise, all quotes and citations in this section are taken from Patterson and Donsbach's 'News Decisions' .

[7] Jonathan Nitzan and Shimshon Bichler, *Capital as Power: A Study of Order and Creorder* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009). I am drawing here on Thorstein Veblen's distinction between business and industry and, in particular, on Nitzan and Bichler's conceptual elaboration of this distinction. On this view, business is an institution of control, and industry is the realm in which knowledge and creativity are applied. References to Veblen's important works can be found in Nitzan and Bichler's book.

[8] A point to which I return in the next paragraph.

[9] Schmidt, 'Disciplined Minds'. A related fact about Patterson and Donsbach's study, which reveals their tendency to prejudge the investigation against the finding of power relations, is the nature of their sample. According to Patterson and Donsbach, the sample pooled together reporters, editors and even some managers and owners (456) in unknown proportions. The uneven opportunities of these actors to shape news content was not regarded as problematic.

[10] David H. Weaver and Cleveland Wilhoit, *The American Journalist in the 1990s: U.S. News People at the End of an Era* (1996) Mahwah, NJ, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 191.

[11] Claudia Mellado, Lea Hellmueller and Wolfgang Donsbach, 'Journalistic Role Performance: A New Research Agenda in a Digital and Global Media Environment,' in *Journalistic Role Performance: Concepts, Contexts and Methods* eds. Mellado et al. (New York: Routledge, 2017), 4.

[12] Daniel C. Hallin, 'Preface,' *Journalistic Role Performance: Concepts, Contexts and Methods* eds. Mellado et al. (New York: Routledge, 2017), xi-xvii.

[13] Arjen van Dalen, Claes H. de Vreese, and Erik Albaek, 'Different Roles, Different Content? A Four-Country Comparison of the Role Conceptions and Reporting Style of Political Journalists,' *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism* (2012) 13 (7), 903–922. Despite recent changes in the study of role conceptions (See Mellado, Hellmueller and Donsbach, 'Role Performance'), van Dalen et al. were correct in that, at the time of writing, 'Studies of journalistic cultures generally study either role conceptions or news content' (904). Thus, van Dalen et al. is the closest that studies of role conceptions ever came to making an empirical case for the explanatory power of role conceptions vis-á-vis news content. Hence the choice to analyse this specific article.

[14] van Dalen et al., 'Different roles, different content?' 904.

[15] Pamela J. Shoemaker and Stephen D. Reese, *Mediating the Message: Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content* (Toronto: Longman, 1996). Among other things, the book provides historical background on the scholarly attempts to explain news content.

[16] van Dalen et al., 'Different roles, different content?,' 904.

[17] Ibid. Unless stated otherwise all subsequent citations in this section are from van Dalen et al. Page numbers are provided in the text.

[18] Arjen van Dalen, Claes H. de Vreese, and Erik Albaek, 'Different Roles, Different Content? A Four-Country Comparison of the Role Conceptions and Reporting Style of Political Journalists,' *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism* (2012) 13 (7), 905.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] The authors use the term 'sacredotal' to describe such a hypothetical role conception, and counterpose it to a 'pragmatic' role conception, which sees news values only in conflict and game frames.

[22] Thus, for instance, some scholarly literature provides grounds for questioning the left-wing credentials of both the Labour Party in the UK and the German SPD. See Luke March and Cas Mudde, 'What's Left of the Radical Left? The European Radical Left After 1989: Decline and Mutation,' *Comparative European Politics* (2005) 3, 23–49 (See specifically: 36) ; *Leo Panitch and Colin Leys, The End of Parliamentary Socialism: From New Left to New Labour* (London and New York: Verso, 2001).

[23] Notably, the authors found no evidence of disproportionate media attention vis-a-vis any of the political parties (914, Table 3).

[24] Claudia Mellado and Arjen van Dalen, 'Between Rhetoric and Practice: Explaining the Gap between Role Conception and Performance in Journalism,' *Journalism Studies* 2014 15 (6), 859–878.

[25] Mellado and Van Dalen, 'Rhetoric and Practice,' 868.

[26] Ibid, 873.

[27] Ibid, Appendix A, 877.
[28] Herman and Chomsky, 'Consent.'
[29] Mellado and van Dalen, 860.
[30] The only analytically problematic feature of the model is 'anti-communist ideology'. Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), xvii.
[31] David Ryfe, 'News Routines, Role Performance and Change in Journalism,' in *Journalistic Role Performance: Concepts, Contexts and Methods* eds. Mellado et al. (New York: Routledge, 2017). Ryfe (2017) uses the concept of power twice in this essay (127, 132), but not in the context of institutions being shapers of practices. Unless stated otherwise, all subsequent citations are from Ryfe, 'Change in Journalism.'
[32] Ibid., 127.
[33] Ibid., 127.
[34] Ibid., 128.
[35] Ibid., 128.
[36] Ibid., 130-1.
[37] Ibid., 197.
[38] Ibid., 129.
[39] Ibid., 129.
[40] Ibid., 129.
[41] Ibid., 127.
[42] Herman and Chomsky, 'Manufacturing Consent'.
[43] McChesney, 'Media,' 128.
[44] Ryfe mentions the recent works of the following journalism scholars: Anderson, Benson, Lowrey, Ryfe, Turner, Usher, Willig. I take these to be representative of contemporary mainstream (and indeed influential) journalism studies.
[45] Ibid., 128.
[46] Ryfe uses the terms 'objectivism and subjectivism' on page 128. However, he clarifies on the preceding page that these are equivalent to 'structure and agency' respectively. I adopt the latter concepts on the assumption they are more familiar to the reader.
[47] Ibid., 128.