

JAWA POS's DetEksi, THE YOUNG URBAN SOCIETY'S NEWSPAPER

Escaping from the Propaganda Model

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Introduction

When Jawa Pos with its DetEksi is considered as an innovative newspaper and awarded The World Young Reader Prize 2011, the judges must have thought that it has presented the best project or activity in their criteria of young reader development. According to the judges Jawa Pos has done an outstanding job with an enduring, substantial, successful commitment to engage young people on and off the printed page. "Its daily three-page DetEksi effort is more than a standard newspaper youth section. It's a complete strategy for finding, engaging, and retaining young readers. Most importantly, it has worked." Besides having been the Newspaper of the Year 2011, it also wins the top prize for enduring excellence. How this success has contributed to the newspaper business has made me think about the propaganda model proposed by Chomsky and Herman in their book, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of Mass Media*.

Propaganda Model has been introduced by Chomsky and Herman since 1988 to explain the behavior of the mass media in the States. The propaganda model proposes 5 'filters' in society which determine what 'news' is; in other words, what gets printed in newspapers or broadcast by radio and television. Herman and Chomsky's model also explains how mainstream has little or even nothing to do with the coverage of the media to public, while the government can convey its messages to the public without being filtered. After more than

20 years, however I am doubtful that the five filters are still effective and influential. This paper tries to argue that Jawa Pos with its DetEksi, as the young urban society's newspaper, has escaped from Chomsky and Herman's propaganda model despite the fact that corporate ownership of Jawa Pos shapes the editorial content.

Chomsky and Herman's Propaganda Model

According to Herman and Chomsky, in the property-oriented world and the world of the conflict of interests, mass media needs a systematic propaganda to carry out the function as a system to communicate messages and symbols to public. Besides the fact that media has been monopolized, it is clear that media devotes itself to the dominant elite in the countries where the power of the media is in the hands of state bureaucracy. Herman and Chomsky (1988) suggest a propaganda model. The model seeks to explain how people are propagandized and how consent for various economic, social and political policies are "manufactured" in the public mind due to this propaganda.

It presents "a free market analysis" of mainstream media, resulting "the outcome of the working of the market forces." Instead of being liberal and dedicating itself to the public interest, media serves as the propaganda functions for the dominant elite and capitalist society. They further assume that the mass media helps the ruling elite to manipulate the opinions of the media readers. News is subject to commercial competitions for profit; therefore, there is a profit motive that requires a stable profitable business. When Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model proposes the five filters that determine the media to be printed or broadcast, they have the assumption that mainstream media is not given a freedom what to write and to expose.

The Five Filters

Herman and Chomsky's "propaganda model" describes the five filters applied to news reporting in mass media. The first filter of the propaganda model is size, ownership and profit orientation of the mass media. Since the media are owned by the elite class that manages the media to cater their interests and manufacture consent in the public, they must fulfill the financial goal of the

owners. So, they run for profit. In other words, the media are large businesses that are controlled by wealthy people who have the common interests with other big corporations, bank, and governments. For an example, there are twenty-four giant companies such as ABC, NBC, CBS, New York Times, Washington Post, Time, and Newsweek that are owned by rich people who have the assets in excess of \$ 1 billion (Herman and Chomsky, 1998;13). They do the business with commercial and investment bankers, getting loans and credits. They are interlocked in the sense that they are fully integrated into the market.

The second filter is the advertising license to do business. Advertising is a news filter. Mass media, especially newspapers have to attract advertisers in order to cover the costs of production. Without advertising, the newspapers will be very expensive, and will soon die in the marketplace. In other words without the support of the advertisers, any publication or commercial radio, or TV station will not be able to survive, because the majority of the revenue of the mass media come from advertising, not from sales or subscriptions. Consequently there is a kind of competition throughout the media to get advertisers, since the media will endanger themselves if they get less advertising than the others. It is clear, therefore, that the media has to cater the business interests.

For an example, the power of the advertisers to television programming is obvious. The advertisers can buy and pay for a program. They are the “patrons” that provide the media subsidy. They also can interfere and direct the content of the program. On the other hand, stations and television networks maintain the flow of the audience, by making the audience keep on watching the programs, thus maintaining the rating and the income from the advertisings. According to Herman and Chomsky, even when there is a threat of withdrawal of advertising, the editorial content will be affected. Therefore, the content of the news has to be in line with the interests of the advertisers.

Another example is that the public television WNET loses its financial support from a multinational company, Gulf + Western when the station shows a documentary film, entitled “Hungry for Profit” that contains a critical exposure about Gulf + Western’s activity in the third world countries. The company says that WNET is anti-business and has behaved such as the enemy of the fund supporter (Herman and Chomsky, 17). I think WNET will never try to do the same mistake again. Thus, advertising acts as a news filter.

The third filter that Herman and Chomsky propose is the sourcing of mass media news. What they mean by sourcing of the mass media news is that there is a “symbiotic relationship between the mass media and the powerful sources of information” (Herman and Chomsky,18). From the economic point of view, media cannot afford to place reporters everywhere. At the same time, media needs to have a flow of credible news. Therefore, they only put the reporters in the places where the resourceful and trustworthy news are likely to happen, such as in the Pentagon, the White House.

Besides, it is assumed that getting the credible news from these institutions will be able to decrease the investigation costs, or even to save the costs for checking, re-checking and cross-checking when they get information from the untrustworthy sources. Like these institutions, business companies and organizations are also considered as the centers of the trustworthy news. Mass media companies also think that these centers provide accurate news. On the other hand, the centers of the sources of information also gain advantages from this relationship. They get the dependency of the media in order to manage and to manipulate the media to follow their specific agenda. The journalists and reporters are not supposed to offend these powerful sources of information. If they do by even questioning the bias or truthfulness of the news, they will be threatened by not having the access of fresh news.

As a consequence, this dependency on the official sources make those who have the power to determine what is news and what is not news. Those who are in power even hire the experts who functions as the ‘think tank’ to straighten out the biased statements given by any sources outside the official sources. They help the official sources to convey their messages and to structure all biases, despite the fact that mass media also have their experts to give opinions and analyze the news. So, in this third filter, it can be concluded that those powerful sources that have helped the mass media in minimizing the costs have become the trustworthy sources of information and have got the privileged access to manage the news.

The fourth filter is “flak” and the enforcers. What Herman and Chomsky mean by flak refers to a negative response to a media statement, or TV and radio program. Flak can be in the form of letters, telegrams, phone calls, petitions, lawsuits, speeches and other modes of complaint, threat and even “punitive

actions” Herman and Chomsky, 26). When these actions happen, media can lose its revenue from the advertising. The advertisers will withdraw themselves when the media offend their clients. Therefore, when flak is produced, it can be costly to the media. Television advertisers, for example, might withdraw their financial support. Programs that are likely to elicit flak might be a deterrent to the kinds of facts or opinions that they put on media.

Further, in his Introduction of his book entitled *Images of American Life*, Joel Spring says that “advertisers and broadcasters avoid programming content that might generate large amounts of flak. Advertisers are concerned that flak will hurt the sales of their products, while broadcast owners fear that flak will threaten their government-granted licenses” (Spring, *Introduction* 6). This will cause a loss of their funding. Besides, flak is also threatening, because it has something to do with powerful sources. The powerful sources might question the content of the program and ask for a reply on why a certain program is put on air or printed.

According to Herman and Chomsky, “the government is a major producer of flak, regularly assailing, threatening, and ‘correcting’ the media, trying to contain any deviations from the established line.” (28) They give an example that during the Reagan years, “Mr. Reagan was put on television to exude charm to millions, many of whom berated the media when they dared to criticize the ‘Great Communicator’” (28). Thus, flak is a means of disciplining the media.

The fifth and final news filter that Herman and Chomsky propose is ‘anti-communism’, despite the fact that Chomsky argues that since the end of the Cold War (1945–91), anticommunism was replaced by the “War on Terror”, as the major social control mechanism. Anti-ideologies are portrayed as endangering freedoms of speech, movement, the press, and so forth. They argue that such a portrayal is often used as a means to silence voices that criticize the elite interests.

Escaping From the Propaganda Model

The five filters suggested by Herman and Chomsky to analyse how the propaganda model performs are diminished in the case of DetEksi, a special

page of *Jawa Pos* that is intended for young people. In DetEksi things analyzed by Herman and Chomsky's five filters are somewhat different. The five filters that are supposed to serve as descriptions of the media as they existed in the United States as they exist today, have been challenged by the fact that DetEksi has screened out all those assumptions. DetEksi has proved that it exists in the beginning of the democratic era (the year 2000) in Indonesia by empowering the young people through its column, consisting of news, interviews, discussion and any topic related to the young people.

In a democratic country like Indonesia, DetEksi challenges the propaganda model because it does not experience the filters that have been discussed by Herman and Chomsky. With regard to the media ownership, it has been known that during the Suharto era conflicts of interest are common in Indonesian Media. The media's role as a watchdog becomes problematic when it clashes with the owners who control the news. However, in post Suharto era, it seems there is separation between ownership and the management of news organizations. Endy M Bayuni of the *Jakarta Post*, as quoted by Darudoyo in his article "Editorial Dependence" says that there is 'a wall built separating the editorial from the commercial department'.

That is true when Azrul Ananda, the President Director of Jawa Pos has the idea of establishing DetEksi as a part of Jawa Pos. He does that to increase the image and sales of the newspaper. In the interview with SWA magazine, he says that DetEksi is run for and by young people, especially the urban young people at the age of 10 to 40. The contents of the DetEksi varies from the life of young people, automotive, style, technology, to anime (<http://www.jawapos.co.id/profile/index.php>). This DetEksi takes about 3 pages and it is free from the owner's interference. The topics are purely written without the filter that might influence the content.

In addition to that, DetEksi as one of the main strengths of Jawa Post has never been bothered with the advertising. Since it is for young people to actualize themselves, there is a commitment in the management that that they will not accept any advertisement concerning energizing drinks, alcoholic drinks, and cigarettes. Without those three sponsorships DetEksi still exists. The rationale behind this is that DetEksi column is fully managed by very young journalists who work as part timers because they are students. In his further interview,

Ananda says to SWA that because the DetEksi staff are mostly students, even their school achievement will be his consideration, not the revenue from the advertisement.

Like advertising that has not been the filter whether the topic is put into print or not, reliance on official sources that has been discussed by Herman and Chomsky has not become the problem in DetEksi. DetEksi has given rise to a phenomenon called “student journalism” that assumes that any amateur students can be a journalist, from the reporters, editors, to the photographers. Most of the traditional journalists rely on official sources, but these student journalists do not. Anyone can be the source of news. They bypass the filter of official sources. After corporate ownership, advertising, and sourcing, the fourth filter, “flak and the enforcers” that talks about flak—negative responses to a media statement or program— and how it can be a powerful force influencing which news is filtered before publishing has not been the concern in DetEksi. The audience of DetEksi is young people. They are not involved yet in political matters.

The last filter that is proposed by Herman and Chomsky is ‘anti-communism’ which later is changed into ‘war on terror’, has become an “ideal controlled mechanism” (Rampton, 2007). Although it is considered as a potent filter, it does not affect DetEksi at all. With the method of precision journalism, DetEksi tries to embrace the young readers by using a quantitative social research. Since most of the topics discussed are about the life of young people with its problems as young urban people, DetEksi tries to accommodate the relationships between parents and children, between young people and their peer. According to the polling done by DetEksi on February 11, 2010, the column that discusses about the social and psychological life of young people, becomes the daily reading of young people in Surabaya. In other words, the published articles in DetEksi has been escaping from the ideology that might make it impossible to put into the newspaper.

Conclusion

Although the propaganda model remains a useful framework for analyzing the media, it does not work in the case of DetEksi as a part of Jawa Pos. People

believe that the propaganda model and its five filters often decisively influence the media behavior and performance. It is true when people spell out that a propaganda model sees the media as serving a societal purpose. However, when the media serves the society, it does not have to defend the economic, social, and political agenda of the privileged groups, particularly, the owners of the media, and the government. In the case of DetEksi, it has succeeded to be awarded.

Another, important factor that can be noted is that the specific filtering mechanisms that Herman and Chomsky describe in *Manufacturing Consent* may not apply in the same ways to DetEksi. The analysis has elicited evidences that there is an independence on the operations of the publishing DetEksi, including the ownership, advertising, official sources, fear of flak, and ideological influence that might interfere the content.

In the analysis it has been proved that the operation of the five filters is weak or even does not work at all. For example, without the advertising the audience and readers of DetEksi has significantly raised since it has first published in 2004 into 713 young readers everyday (<http://www.jawapos.co.id/profile/index.php>) Besides, DetEksi follows what is called student journalism. Everyone is a journalist. Nobody can interfere with what they do in covering the media, especially topics that have been selected by them. In other words, DetEksi has succeeded in escaping from the propaganda model and it bypasses the five filters.

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