



# THE FREE PRESS?

A MONTHLY JOURNAL AND TEACHING TOOL EXPOSING PROPAGANDA IN THE MASS MEDIA

A news resource which is **not:**

Owned by **billionaires**  
Beholden to **advertisers**  
Staffed by **sycophants**

Unlike other journals we **declare our interests:**

No **profit motive**  
No **cronyism**  
A challenge to the **propaganda model** of the mainstream media

**What is the propaganda model?**

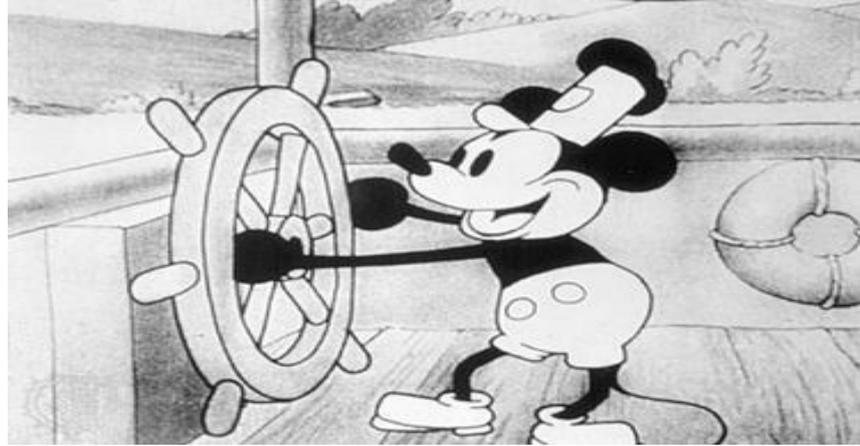
The vast majority of “headline news” providers in the UK are profit-driven corporations, affiliated to even larger corporations, who make most of their money from selling advertising space to other businesses.

The propaganda model predicts that such media will generate a view of the world that is overwhelmingly favourable to the interests of big business and marginalises, ignores or attacks opposing views.

A wealth of evidence supports the model. Head to [www.the-free-press.co.uk](http://www.the-free-press.co.uk) for an overview.

Wondering why you’ve never heard of the propaganda model?

Perhaps you’ve been getting your news from...the news.



Mickey at the wheel (of capitalism?)

## DISNEY PLUS AND THE CULTURE INDUSTRY

As anticipation builds for the launch of the Disney Plus streaming service next month, fuelled by paid advertisements, product tie-ins and media articles facilitated by Disney PR, a story which isn’t gaining much traction in the media is the potential threat posed by the service.

The Culture Industry<sup>1</sup> is a sociological theory devised by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer that complements the propaganda model. The theory highlights “how popular culture in the capitalist society functions like an industry in producing standardized products which produce standardized people”<sup>2</sup>.

What does this mean? It means, in effect, that just as mass media news coverage reflects the interests of the corporations that produce the news, so too does the entertainment they produce.

Yes, huge corporations produce movies and other forms of entertainment to make money, but since profit is their primary concern this inevitably filters into the nature of their content. Signs and symbols conducive to profit (e.g. adventurous rebellion that settles into a “happy ending” where the structures of society are unchanged) are far more likely to be found in their entertainment output than those which question prevailing norms.

“The dream industry does not so much fabricate the dreams of the customers as introduce the dreams of the suppliers among the people”<sup>3</sup> write Adorno and Horkheimer.

Few companies highlight this better than Disney.

Walt Disney is a controversial figure. While some may dismiss overt racism in older Disney movies as “of that time,” Disney’s attitude to those seeking to reign in

capitalism would doubtless strike a chord with the Trump administration today.

“When his cartoonists tried to form a union, (Disney) brought in armed guards” write the Guardian. “He fired organisers, cut wages and slashed the opening hours of the studio coffee shop. At one point, faced with a strike picket, Disney had to be physically restrained from attacking the leader of the industrial action”<sup>4</sup>.

The corporation he built has reaped the benefits of such ruthlessness. Disney placed 53 on last year’s Fortune 500 list with 60 billion dollars of revenue<sup>5</sup>. It is one of the most powerful companies in the world – and growing.

According to Business Insider, in 1983 50 companies controlled the majority of the US media. Today, a mere six corporations control 90%<sup>6</sup>.

Disney have been one of the most active participants in the ongoing acquisition and assimilation of competitors and subsidiaries. Their stable now includes ABC News (which won largest audience award for a single news programme in 2018), ESPN, the Disneyland park franchises and TV/film studios (including recent purchases Pixar and Marvel).

The addition of Disney Plus to their repertoire takes things a step further. Disney

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**How does the propaganda model work in practice?**

Critics of the propaganda model claim that it is a “conspiracy theory.”

This, perhaps purposefully, misses the point of the propaganda model.

A conspiracy will not happen of its own accord. People must gather in rooms and have meetings to instigate a conspiracy.

The beauty of modern media propaganda is that it simply **follows from the institutional structure of large media companies.**

Consider someone at the bottom of this structure: a young journalist at Rupert Murdoch’s Sun newspaper: **Will this journalist have to be told, in a conspiratorial manner, not to pursue stories about unrest in the News International boardroom and corporate malpractice by one of the paper’s leading advertisers?**

Not likely. Do **you** try to earn job security by going against the values of the institution that employs you?

Of course, like us, journalists are unlikely to reflect on the institutional parameters that confine them. Far easier to subconsciously adopt these values and *believe* that you believe them.

If 90-95% of mainstream journalism positions are filled by people who share the same framework of values, know which stories to pursue and which to ignore, what can be said and can’t be said, that makes for a robust propaganda system.

You will, of course, have a hard time convincing journalists that this is what they’re doing. Then again, as Upton Sinclair famously said:

have now reached a point known as “vertical integration”<sup>7</sup>. Put simply, this means that the corporation control almost all different stations of a product’s journey – from production of movies down through advertising, supply and distribution.

Without having to partner with Netflix or other streaming services to distribute their movies, Disney have full control of how their products reach into consumers’ homes – so what kind of message do these products convey?

“(Disney) has created a self-contained universe which presents consistently recognizable values,”<sup>8</sup> writes Alan Bryman in the Disneyization of Society. “...one of the most persistent problems with the Disney films, the fairy tales in particular, is where the young female heroes are frequently depicted as either aspiring to become a princess or can only find true happiness through becoming a princess”<sup>9</sup>.

Newer Disney/Pixar films like Brave have received praise for presenting a more nuanced and three-dimensional depiction of young women pursuing what, superficially at least, is a worthwhile and positive goal of self-realisation. However, these pursuits are often structured as an initial rebellion against her societal or cultural duty, but which in the conclusion of the film becomes a submission and (re)assimilation into the rigid social structure - often as a member of royalty or nobility, which is presented as a

legitimate and unquestioned social structure in itself.

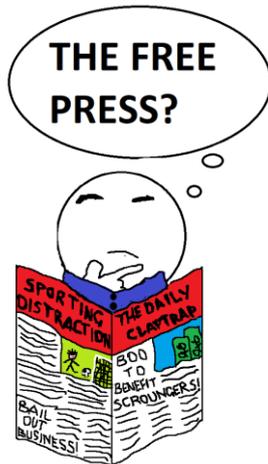
Little wonder the philosopher Baudrillard wrote that behind the “smiling eyes” of “pretty little sentimental creatures in grey fur coats...lurks a cold, ferocious beast fearfully stalking us” – the portrayal of a “deep frozen, infantile world”<sup>10</sup> which promotes socially conservative values.

Of course, once the beast has consumers in its grip they will struggle to break free – a cyclical element of the Culture Industry highlighted by Adorno and Horkheimer.

While newer mediums like Netflix necessarily possess a more “democratic” strand - monitoring consumer demand and tailoring content accordingly - Disney can rely on established brand loyalty and nostalgia to pull consumers towards Disney Plus (witness the recent slew of lacklustre live action remakes like The Lion King).

Subscribers to Disney Plus may wish to ponder whether by inviting these smiling furry creatures across the threshold of their homes, they are also inviting the claws of a cold ferocious beast to further tighten their grip on our lives.

**“Whoever controls the media, controls the mind”  
Jim Morrison**



**“It’s difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon him not understanding it.”**

**HOMEWORK!**

Watch a Disney film of your choosing. After the movie is over take some time to reflect on what you’ve viewed and any ideology promoted by the film or assumed by it.

You may wish to consider:

- The narrative and character arc (what did the character/s set out to achieve and how was their journey resolved?)
- How different groups are represented – e.g. are different values/objectives assumed for male and female characters?
- What values are prioritised over others and what social/economic structures (e.g. a ruling class) are questioned or not questioned

E-mail us at [thefreepress@yahoo.com](mailto:thefreepress@yahoo.com) to let us know what you found or visit the website to look at a model answer looking at *The Mandalorian!*

\* Visit [www.the-free-press.co.uk](http://www.the-free-press.co.uk) here for a list of sources used, an extended version of the main article and more information on the media and propaganda