

Manufacturing consent through integration: Social networks of German journalists in the elite milieu and their effects on coverage

Often we think of big media as watchdogs who should criticize and control the powerful - and as forums where all relevant information and political options are discussed. But many critical scientists suppose that big media basically reflect the debate among political (and business) elites and ignore, marginalize or deligitimize challengers of a given elite consensus (as the Canadian newspaper owner Conrad Black puts it: "If the small guy's guardian is the media, then the small guy is in bigger trouble than I thought"). This research is about the interactions between high-ranking journalists in Germany and elites from politics and business, or, in other words, about a possible "embeddedness" of journalists in the elite milieu and a possible "cognitive co-optation". Most of the previous research in this field was done by questioning the players, the results being anonymized. This study has chosen a different methodological approach in order to pinpoint any possible influence by elite sources on journalistic content. Firstly, an analysis of the social networks focuses on the social environment of German journalists, in particular that of four senior foreign policy editors with the leading newspapers *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Die Welt* and *Die Zeit*. These were involved in a number of associations, think tanks and policy planning groups having ties with the German federal government, the USA and NATO where they potentially had contact with national and international political and business elites. Following this, a frame analysis shows that the output of the four journalists on the controversial issues of the definition of security ('extended security concept') and of deployments of the German army abroad (especially in Afghanistan) follows the same line as that of the identified peer groups. Finally, possible reasons of this coincidence and normative implications are discussed.

Keywords: journalism, journalistic independence, elite discourse, social networks, mainstream media

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