Advanced International Journal for Research (AIJFR)
E-ISSN: 3048-7641 ● Website: www.aijfr.com ● Email: editor@aijfr.com

Manufacturing Truth: Media Propaganda and Political Power in Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix

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Abstract:

Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix, the fifth book in the Harry Potter series penned by J K Rowling is widely regarded as the most political novel in the whole series. While the earlier novel deals with the protagonist and antagonist face off, in this novel Harry had to face government and false propaganda. The central tension of the novel is not Voldemort's return, but the Ministry of Magic's refusal to believe Harry and Dumbledore. Their constant efforts to make the ministry understand is retaliated with them branded as liars by the ministry and press.

The Ministry of Magic never used force to control the population. On the other hand, they employ a series of strategic propaganda using press and institutional control to manufacture a public reality. The Ministry deploys false narratives through the popular newspaper The Daily Prophet, to create a fake narrative and also slander anyone who dissent with the ministry view. This paper illustrates how the ministry used false propaganda to manufacture truth and influence public opinion through control of information rather than force.

1. Introduction:

The title of the paper draws upon Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman's concept of Manufacturing Consent which argues that political power works not just through force but through strategic control of information, media narratives and public discourse. One of the important ways through which political power controls narratives is the media. Citizens often accept official narratives because they trust established institutions. Information is selectively presented, dissenters are portrayed as false narratives or are discredited and certain points are amplified while others are ignored. Most political bodies use propaganda to legitimize political authority. Propaganda creates support for government decisions and suppresses criticism and alternative viewpoints. It represents the government's version of reality as the only truth.

In the novel, the ministry of magic fears losing political authority. Instead of facing the truth of Voldemort's return, it tries to control the narrative. The ministry constantly uses The Daily Prophet to influence public opinion and slander the people who dissent with the government policies. Harry and

Dumbledore are portrayed as unreliable and dangerous. The public is encouraged to trust the ministry rather than eyewitness accounts. The novel thus depicts propaganda as a primary tool of control rather than physical oppression. Controlling perceptions became the dependent force upon which political authority relies upon. So ultimately, in the novel, the conflict is not between good versus evil but a struggle over truth and public belief. This makes the propaganda theory an effective lens for analyzing the novel.

This paper will examine how the Ministry manufactures truth and media shapes the public opinion. It will also analyze the way through which dissent is delegitimized and explores the role of propaganda in preserving political power. It ultimately shows the way through which Rowling critiques the relationship between media and state through this fictional world.

This paper begins by establishing a theoretical framework for understanding propaganda and institutional power, drawing on Herman and Chomsky's concept of manufactured consent alongside Foucault's account of the relationship between power and knowledge. It then turns to the historical and political context of the Ministry of Magic's response to Voldemort's return, examining the institutional incentives that drive Cornelius Fudge toward denial rather than disclosure. The paper subsequently analyzes the Daily Prophet as the primary instrument of public-facing propaganda, tracing its smear campaigns against Harry and Dumbledore and its strategic omissions, before contrasting this with the marginalized but truthful Quibbler. Attention then shifts to Hogwarts itself, where Dolores Umbridge's Educational Decrees and surveillance apparatus reveal how propaganda operates not only through the press but through the capture of educational institutions. A discussion of language and doublethink follows, examining how the Ministry's rhetorical evasions restrict not only what can be said but what can be thought. The paper then considers Dumbledore's Army as a form of counter-propaganda, an alternative epistemic community organized in resistance to institutional control, before concluding with broader reflections on the novel's relevance to real-world patterns of media manipulation and institutional denial. Together, these sections argue that Order of the Phoenix dramatizes political power as fundamentally an exercise in controlling truth itself, rather than simply suppressing it.

2. Propaganda, Power, and Knowledge

According to Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, "Propaganda is a form of communication that attempts to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist" (Jowett and O'Donnell 1). It strives to create public opinion that supports the stance of the propagandist. In Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix, the Ministry of Magic, along with the help of popular media, engages in a wide campaign to propagate their views and discredit the people who oppose. One of the main ways through which propaganda works is the media. It acts as a system that serves political bodies. Herman and Chomsky argue that the mass media function not merely to provide information but also to shape social values, noting that "it is their function to amuse, entertain, and inform, and to inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs, and codes of behavior that will integrate them into the institutional structures of the larger society" (Herman and Chomsky 61). The Daily Prophet, one of the most popular newspapers in the wizarding world, is deliberately used by the Ministry of Magic to publish what they want as truth to the wizarding world while also hiding or ignoring the real facts lurking around them.

In Power/Knowledge, Foucault argues that power produces knowledge, and knowledge reinforces power. Power, according to Foucault, does not always operate through force alone. Sometimes, power works through knowledge, influence and creation of filtered information among the public thereby forcing them inadvertently to coerce with the wills of those in power without relying on force. Those in power determine what is true and they use their resources to spread their truth among the public, the chief resource being the media. Truth, thus does not become objective but rather a socially and politically constructed concept. Every society creates a "regime of truth"—a system deciding what counts as truth, who is allowed to speak and whose knowledge is considered legitimate. Institutions such as governments, schools, and the media establish these truths. It shapes language, narratives and discourse. Competing narratives are dismissed as irrational, dangerous, or false and individuals who challenge official truth lose credibility. At the end, the control is internalized. People begin to accept official narratives voluntarily. Power becomes effective because people regulate themselves rather than being constantly forced. In the novel Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix, when the ministry refuses to accept Lord Voldemort's return, it uses the popular newspaper The Daily Prophet to create an official version of reality. Their main opponents, Harry and Dumbledore are portrayed as unstable and unreliable. In the end, the public accepts the ministry's version because it comes from an official authority. The novel shows many such instances through which authority depends on controlling truth rather than simply exercising legal or physical force.

Orwell argues that controlling language means controlling thought. 1984, Newspeak reduces vocabulary to eliminate dissenting ideas This proves his point that if people cannot have right words to express their ideas, eventually their ideas will wither and die in their minds itself. Another way through which the novel induces power without force is through manipulation of reality. The Party often rewrites history with alternative versions to match its political interests. Facts become unstable because they are shaped by political authority rather than evidence. Psychological control is stressed rather than physical control. Citizens begin to police their own thoughts out of fear or habit. Orwell shows us that power succeeds when obedience becomes internalized. A comparison between 1984 and Order of the Phoenix shows us many parallels. The Ministry insists that Voldemort has not returned despite overwhelming evidence. The Daily Prophet repeats this official narrative until the public accepts it. Harry and Dumbledore are portrayed as liars, encouraging citizens to distrust independent sources of information. Dolores Umbridge institutionalizes these controls through Educational Decrees. The decrees regulate what teachers may discuss, what students may learn, and what opinions may be expressed. Like Newspeak, these restrictions narrow acceptable discourse, making critical thinking increasingly difficult. The decrees demonstrate that controlling education is another way of controlling political consciousness.

In the novel, the Ministry of Magic is the chief political authority that uses propaganda to protect its legitimacy rather than inform the public of the truth. Propaganda is a deliberate and systematic effort to shape perceptions and direct behavior; the Ministry's denial of Voldemort's return exemplifies this strategy. The Daily Prophet reflects Herman and Chomsky's concept of manufacturing consent, serving elite political interests instead of acting as an independent press. Foucault's power/knowledge explains how the Ministry defines what counts as "truth," marginalizing Harry and Dumbledore's testimony. Hogwarts, under Umbridge's Educational Decrees, mirrors Orwell's 1984, where controlling language, education, and acceptable discourse limits critical thought and encourages doublethink, ensuring institutional obedience and ideological conformity.

3. Historical and Political Context: The Ministry's Fear

The Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge believes that admitting Voldemort's return would destabilize the normalcy that they have been trying to build for the past thirteen years. "It seems to me that you are all determined to start a panic that will destabilize everything we have worked for these last thirteen years!" (Rowling, 456). Acknowledging Voldemort's return threatens his authority and legacy. He prioritizes his personal reputation over the well being of the people he promised to serve. Fudge also fears that accepting Dumbledore's claims would elevate Dumbledore's political influence and threaten his own leadership. Fudge used denial as a political strategy.Instead of addressing the crisis, Fudge discredits Harry and Dumbledore to divert public attention from the Ministry's incompetence. He influences the media to manipulate the information, reinforcing his image as a capable leader while his dissenters are portrayed as unreliable. Fudge's decisions stem from fear, denial, and self-preservation rather than concern for public welfare, illustrating how leaders often manipulate truth to safeguard their authority and legacy.

The Ministry of Magic prioritizes protecting its credibility and political authority over informing the public about Voldemort's return. Acknowledging the crisis would expose their systemic failures and invite criticism upon their governance. So they decided to suppress the truth. The Ministry's policy created a false sense of security among the public. They were able to prevent panic among the people temporarily, but they also left the people unprepared for the real threat that was about to come. Throughout the novel, one cannot miss the relationship between Ministry and press. The Daily Prophet helps the ministry to maintain its "all is perfect motto" and further aids them in tarnishing the public image of the people who raise their voice against the ministry. Similar patterns occur when governments minimize wars, epidemics, economic crises, or environmental disasters to preserve public confidence, avoid political responsibility, or protect their image. Rowling suggests that when institutions value self-preservation over transparency, propaganda replaces truth, and public safety ultimately suffers because informed decision-making becomes impossible.

In Order of Phoenix, the chief aid of the Ministry of Magic in its propaganda venture is The Daily Prophet, the most popular newspaper of the wizarding world. Even though it is not a state owned press, The Daily Prophet consistently aligns with the Ministry agenda, functioning as a captured and compliant press rather than an independent watchdog. Instead of scrutinizing those in power, the Daily Prophet legitimizes the Ministry's claim of complete safety and voluntarily engages in slandering the ministry's opponents. Editorial decisions are influenced by political pressure, privileged access, and dependence on official sources, leading to self-censorship and selective reporting. Alternative voices, particularly Harry Potter and Dumbledore, are marginalized, ridiculed, or portrayed as unreliable, narrowing public debate. This relationship reflects Herman and Chomsky's manufacturing consent model, in which the media serves elite interests by filtering information instead of challenging authority. Rowling suggests that a press need not be directly controlled by the state to become an effective instrument of propaganda; institutional dependence and political alignment are sufficient to undermine journalistic independence and shape public opinion.

In the previous novels itself, Goblet of Fire to be precise, Rowling establishes the reputation of The Daily Prophet as a newspaper that sensationalizes news. The character Rita Skeeter, who was introduced in Goblet of Fire, represents media that gives priority to sensation, controversy and scandal

readership over accuracy or ethical reporting. What Rowling hinted at in the fourth installment of her Harry Potter series is discussed elaborately in the next part. More than focusing on sensational journalism, the media here also serves the hidden agenda of political power. Sensational journalism makes the public more receptive to stories based on fear, suspicion, and personal attacks. The Ministry already had a media apparatus and it exploited the existing culture of sensational reporting to serve its purpose. Dumbledore's and Harry's treatment by the ministry shows that they were dealing with political disagreement through scandal. Because the Daily Prophet is already widely read, its distorted narratives appear authoritative and influence public opinion. Rowling suggests that propaganda becomes especially effective when political manipulation enters a media system already accustomed to sensationalism and personality-driven reporting.

4. The Daily Prophet as a Propaganda Apparatus

In the novel Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix, The Daily Prophet is a principal source of news in the wizarding world. For that reason, the newspaper possesses immense regard and enjoys enormous influence over public opinion. Even though Daily Prophet is presented as an independent newspaper, it increasingly functions as an ideological instrument of the Ministry of Magic. Although Rita Skeeter never explicitly states that the Ministry has taken over the Daily Prophet, she makes it clear that the newspaper has become aligned with the Ministry's political agenda. Unable to publish Harry's account in the Prophet, Rita agrees to write for The Quibbler, implicitly acknowledging that the Prophet is no longer functioning as an independent newspaper.

Rather than informing and preparing the readers of the upcoming threat, as they are ideologically expected to do, it selectively constructs reality and manufactures truth by deciding what information deserves publication and how it should be interpreted. Through biased reporting, character attacks, and suppression of dissenting voices, the newspaper becomes a mechanism for manufacturing public consent. This section examines how the Daily Prophet transforms journalism into propaganda by manipulating truth, discrediting opposition, and controlling the circulation of information.

Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix is different from Rowling's other novel because Harry Potter had to face a different enemy in the novel. Harry becomes the primary target because he publicly claims Voldemort has returned. The Prophet repeatedly depicts him as emotionally unstable, attention-seeking, and dishonest. Through snide remarks in between the news, The Daily Prophet makes him a standing joke and an unreliable person. The extent of this defaming campaign was so brutal that even one of Harry's close friends, Seamus Heaney calls him mad and stupid. Headlines and articles emphasize his youth and supposed instability instead of examining his evidence. The label "The Boy Who Lies" replaces his earlier heroic image as "The Boy Who Lived." They personally attack Harry to divert the issue of the public from the real problem- Voldemort's return. This represents ad hominem propaganda, attacking the messenger rather than addressing the message. Repetition gradually normalizes the false narrative until many readers accept it.

Along with Harry, Albus Dumbledore is also targeted by The Daily Prophet. He is portrayed as senile, politically ambitious and increasingly irrational. The Prophet suggests that he wants to seize control of the ministry undemocratically. Dumbledore enjoyed decades of credibility before his falling out with Cornelius Fudge. But now, his credibility has been overshadowed by speculation about his motives.

Instead of debating his warnings, the newspaper questions his character bypassing his genius and experience. The defaming of Albus Dumbledore shows us the transformation of political disagreement into personal suspicion.Cornelius Fudge, Minister of Magic and Dumbledore had a disagreement, mistook Dumbledore's warnings as an attempt to grab his position and this suspicion gradually increased making him paranoid by the minute. While Harry Potter was defamed through minor in-between lines within the newspaper, Albus Dumbledore has been more vigorously attacked than Harry. Albus Dumbledore enjoys more credibility for his words than a thirteen year old boy and for this reason, their attacks on Dumbledore are more direct and provocative. By undermining the most respected authority opposing the Ministry, the Prophet weakens public resistance.

Foucault's concept of **power/knowledge** helps explain why the Ministry targets Dumbledore's reputation rather than engaging with his evidence. In Power/Knowledge, Foucault argues that power is exercised by determining who is recognized as a legitimate producer of knowledge. Truth is not simply discovered; it is socially constructed through institutions that decide whose voices deserve authority and whose should be dismissed. Thus, political power functions by establishing a "regime of truth" in which only certain forms of knowledge are considered credible. The Daily Prophet participates in this process by portraying Dumbledore as senile, politically ambitious, and unstable instead of addressing his warnings about Voldemort's return. By shifting public attention from the validity of his claims to his alleged motives, the Ministry undermines his epistemic authority—the public's trust in him as a reliable source of knowledge. Once Dumbledore's credibility is damaged, his testimony loses persuasive force regardless of its accuracy. Rowling thereby illustrates Foucault's argument that modern institutions maintain power not merely by suppressing alternative truths but by delegitimizing those who produce them, ensuring that official narratives alone are accepted as authoritative.

5. Techniques of Propaganda

Selective Reporting

Selective reporting is one of the most effective techniques of propaganda because it manipulates public opinion without necessarily resorting to outright lies. Herman and Chomsky argue in Manufacturing Consent that the media do not simply transmit information to the public. Instead, information passes through a series of institutional and ideological "filters" that determine what is considered news, whose voices receive legitimacy, and which perspectives are excluded. Propaganda therefore operates not only through false information but also through the strategic omission of inconvenient facts. This is what happens in the novel also. For example, The Daily Prophet does not openly fabricate every story, rather it carefully selects which information deserves public attention. Ministry statements are consistently presented as authoritative while evidence contradicting the Ministry's position receives little or no coverage. In doing so, the newspaper filters reality before it reaches readers. Harry,who is the only eyewitness to Voldemort's return, was not given a platform and his claims were not investigated objectively. Readers of the Daily Prophet therefore never encounter his version of events in a fair or balanced manner. Dumbledore's repeated warnings are also not met with ignorance. Rather than engaging with his evidence, the Prophet tries to minimize his credibility and limits public exposure to his arguments. Public are not left with options of alternate versions. In the end, the public are dissuaded from trusting Harry and Dumbledore not because Harry was disproved, but because they never receive sufficient

evidence supporting him. Thus, the Daily Prophet demonstrates that propaganda does not require constant fabrication. Selective reporting, strategic omission, and the exclusion of dissenting voices are sufficient to manufacture public consent. By controlling the flow of information, the Ministry effectively controls public perception, illustrating Herman and Chomsky's contention that media institutions shape public opinion by deciding which realities become visible and which remain hidden.

Ad Hominem Attacks

The careful analysis of the slandering campaign in the novel makes it clear that the Ministry employs Ad Hominem Attacks. Instead of arguing or contradicting logic, they try to attack the character, motive, or background of the person speaking. The Daily Prophet consistently tries to defame the dissenters, chief ones being Harry Potter and Albus Dumbledore. Harry becomes an unstable attention seeking teenage boy who's also said to have abilities like Parseltongue, ability to talk to snakes (a feat that is attributed to dark wizards.) His previous law breaking activities, which were forgotten and forgiven by the ministry by the ministry, were reported again at constant intervals. Dumbledore is said to be driven by power and he is alleged as deliberately trying to instill panic among the people. The slandering campaign against Dumbledore mainly included his liberal way of running the Hogwarts School and his open attitude to staff appointments. Emotional reactions replace rational discussion and Harry and Dumbledore's claims of the truth are submerged in the defamation published against them.

Appeals to Authority

The Daily Prophet repeatedly refers to statements from 'unnamed officials' or inside sources. They deliberately withhold the identity of the informers in order to create a false pretense that they have ample information about the proceedings inside the ministry. This increases their official credibility. Even when Cornelius Fudge is interviewed, The Daily Prophet only asks questions that Fudge wants to be asked. They present the government statements as unquestionable facts. Ministry claims are established as truths rather than opinions and this discourages readers to question their credibility and accuracy. Government power is exercised on the newspaper to manufacture truth to their will. The ultimate result of this propaganda campaign is that people start to believe in institutions rather than evidence. Here Harry Potter and Dumbledore have clear evidence to support their statement yet people are forced to believe the government version of the tale as original and authentic.

Repetition

The Daily Prophet repeatedly establishes Harry as attention seeking and Dumbledore as trying to undermine the assembly. This is done so as to keep it fresh in the public discourse and create familiarity among the public so that they start to believe what's said in the newspaper. Familiarity creates perceived truth. This strategy can be compared to the one used by George Orwell in his novel 1984. In that novel, lies are repeated constantly into the public discourse to such a degree that it becomes accepted reality. The ruling Party controls not only political institutions but also information, language, memory, and public perception. The Party repeatedly presents false claims as facts until citizens are pressured to accept the official version of reality.

Omission as Propaganda

Propaganda does not work merely by spreading scandal or false information. Omitting the facts is also an equally powerful strategy. Absence of information limits public awareness and that in turn limits questions from the public. When it comes to the novel, The Daily Prophet avoids giving ample space to publish the testimony of people who can support Harry's statements. Occasionally they publish the voices of some people who dissent but at the same time, they are very keen to dig up the past of the people who dissent and publish it as different stories. This is deliberately done to undermine their statements. Not only does the prophet refuse to seriously investigate Harry's claims but they also cover up many mistakes and failures of the Ministry. Their selective reporting and restricted publication of information controls the public perception. When important information is absent, people cannot question them. There are fewer possibilities for comparison, doubt and judgement because the public are not given information. The Daily Prophet therefore functions not merely as a transmitter of Ministry propaganda but as a gatekeeper of information. This illustrates Foucault's 'regime of truth'. Foucault considered truth as a system connected to power that determines which statements are accepted, circulated, authorized and treated as legitimate knowledge.

The Quibbler: Truth from the Margins

While the most popular newspaper The Daily Prophet aligned with the views of ministry, the less popular and what some public treated as eccentric magazine The Quibbler, gave a chance to Harry Potter to express his views. The fact that Quibbler came up with the most reliable news that The Daily Prophet did not publish is an irony in itself because it was supposed to be in the alternate order. The Daily Prophet was the newspaper that was supposed to be the one publishing the credible news while Quibbler always enjoyed the privilege of being an eccentric and unreliable magazine under the leadership of Xenophilus Lovegood, an equally strange man. Rowling reverses the conventional credibility. In the novel, institutional prestige does not represent truth and marginal status does not represent falsehood. Daily Prophet demonstrates how mainstream media can serve political authority, whereas a marginal publication like The Quibbler can provide space for dissenting voices. Through the way Quibbler challenges the powerful institutions that shape what they accept as truth, Rowling encourages readers to question official sources rather than accepting authority as evidence.

Rita Skeeter's Interview and Ministry Suppression

While the novel progresses, in accordance with Hermione's master plan, Harry Potter does get a chance to express his views, with the help of Reeta Skeeter, a veteran lady journalist who previously used to write scoops for The Daily Prophet. Harry's testimony had the ability to break the media controlled version of his character and restore the suppressed voice. After months of silence, the interview gave a chance to restore Harry's voice. Publishing the interview brings information excluded by the mainstream press back into public discourse. The Ministry- even though it claims Harry to be a creator of imaginary stories- still does not take any chances in providing the public with an alternative version. Umbridge uses her control over Hogwarts to ban the magazine that published Harry's article in Hogwarts. Instead of publicly disproving Harry's claims, they are keen to suppress the voice. They are more scared of the circulation of alternate discourse rather than the actual alternate discourse itself. The Ministry's action can be compared to Orwell's idea that controlling information restricts what people can know, discuss, and

ultimately think.

The Daily Prophet thus functions as a propaganda apparatus rather than an independent newspaper. It functions through selective reporting, omission, repetition and character assassination. The Daily Prophet manufactures consent for the Ministry's political agenda. Through the novel Rowling illustrates that propaganda succeeds not only by spreading lies but by shaping the limits of public knowledge and acceptable discourse. The Quibbler's willingness to give Harry a chance to express his viewpoint suggests that truth often survives outside dominant institutions. Ultimately, Rowling demonstrates that the control of information is itself a form of political power, for whoever controls the narrative can shape not only what society believes, but also what it accepts as truth.

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