

Unseeing propaganda: How communication scholars learned to love commercial media | HKS Misinformation Review

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In the communication field's earliest days, scholars devoted much attention to systemic problems, including propaganda-related issues. But curiously, a renewed focus on misinformation notwithstanding, even the general area of propaganda studies has waned since the field's origins. One cause for this erasure, I argue, is that communication scholarship has for many decades largely avoided assailing the *structural* roots of misinformation in *commercial* media systems, especially problems pertaining to monopoly power, systemic racism, and capitalism's effects on news and information systems.

Recalling a time when structural analyses were more central to the communication field—and considering why they receded—might offer insights as to why it was largely ill-prepared for recent crises afflicting news and information systems, from the proliferation of disinformation to the collapse of commercial journalism. Multiple factors have contributed to this intellectual disengagement, including definitional confusion, methodological shifts in research, and technological changes in media systems. But it also stems more broadly from the field's gradual depoliticization and its accommodation of capitalist logics vis-à-vis media institutions.

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