

## MASTER'S THESIS

### Commercial constraints and news content: a comparative study of quality newspapers in France and in the U.S.

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*Date of Award:*  
2004

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**Commercial Constraints and News Content: a Comparative Study of  
Quality Newspapers in France and in the U.S.**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements**

**for the degree of**

**Master of Philosophy**

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**Hong Kong Baptist University**

**September 2004**

## **Abstract**

Can democracy guarantee freedom of expression to all? Do commercial considerations make the news media less likely to question the legitimacy of the status quo? To answer these questions, this study compares the quality newspapers in the U.S., which are entirely financed by their income from commercial activities, and those in France, which are partially subsidised by the government. A total of 476 articles selected between April 10 and July 9, 2003 were analysed. The findings show that, overall, newspapers in both countries tend to legitimise the status quo, but they do it in different ways. Newspapers of both France and the U.S. prefer to use government officials as news sources, but the French newspapers show greater reliance on the government, while American newspapers marginalise non-establishment voices, such as trade unions. Although the articles from French newspapers are found to be more likely to discuss the legitimacy of the government, most of these discussions were conducted by government officials rather than the public. The findings of this study correspond with some of the observations made by critics of media commercialism, but most of their notions were not supported. The research results indicate that further investigation is needed to clarify the relationship between commercial considerations and news content.

## **Table of Contents**

<b>Declaration</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Abstract</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Table of Content</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>List of Figures and Tables</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter One: Literature Review</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1/ Elite Manipulation of Information as the Result of Social Evolution	4
1.2/ Commercial Considerations of the News Media Enhance the Legitimacy of the Status Quo	11
1.3/ Journalistic Routine Legitimises the Status Quo	20
1.4/ Is the Media Manipulated?	23
1.5/ Quantitative Findings	26
<b>Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework</b>	<b>31</b>
2.1/ Hypotheses	32
<b>Chapter Three: Methodology</b>	<b>36</b>
3.1/ Operation	41
3.1.1/ Topics	42
3.1.2/ News Source	44
3.1.3/ News Frame	47
<b>Chapter Four: An Overview of the Press in the U.S. and in France</b>	<b>54</b>
4.1/ The Press in the United States	55
4.1.1/ Early Years	55
4.1.2/ Rise of the Penny Press	59
4.1.3/ Problems and Challenges	62
4.1.4/ New York Times	63

4.1.5/ Washington Post	67
4.2/ The Press in France	71
4.2.1/ Before 1881	72
4.2.2/ 1881- Second World War	73
4.2.3/ Press Reform after the Second World War	77
4.2.4/ Press Subsidies in France	79
4.2.5/ Evaluating the Press Subsidies in France	83
4.2.6/ The Press and the Elites in France	86
4.2.7/ Le Monde	89
4.2.8/ Le Figaro	95
4.2.9/ Commercial Influence and the Press	100
<b>Chapter Five: Findings</b>	<b>101</b>
5.1/ Topic	102
5.2/ News Source	105
5.3/ News Frame	117
5.4/ Discussion	122
5.5/ News Sources and Commercial influence	123
5.6/ Commercial Influence and Legitimation of the Status Quo	125
5.7/ Sensationalism and Commercial Influence	126
5.8/ Hypotheses Revisited	127
5.9/ Analysis of Individual Newspapers	131
<b>Chapter Six: Limitations</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>139</b>
<b>Appendix A: Coding Guide</b>	<b>144</b>
<b>Appendix B: Generic News Frame Analysis by Semetko and Valkenburg</b>	<b>148</b>
<b>Appendix C: Statistics</b>	<b>150</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>191</b>
<b>Curriculum Vitae</b>	<b>196</b>