Ed Herman and Noam Chomsky's Propaganda Model (PM; see Figure 7.1 for illustration) explains elite US news media representations of America's role in the world through five contributory factors, which they call metaphorical 'filters': 'size, ownership and profit orientation' (first filter); 'the advertising license to do business' (second filter); the need for the media to use powerful organizations in 'sourcing' information (third filter); the ability of powerful organizations to issue flak (fourth filter), and a dominant ideology of a superior, benevolent 'us' in the West versus a backward 'them' overseas (fifth filter) (Herman and Chomsky, 1988; 2002). The filters 'cleanse' information from the real world to leave only the 'residue', which is acceptable to established power systems (Herman and Chomsky, 2002: lx). As such, the media 'serve to mobilise support for the special interests that dominate state and private activity...their choices, emphases, and omissions can often be understood best, and sometimes with striking clarity and insight, by analysing them in such terms' (lxix).

Chomsky points to this residue as being consistent with a benevolent meta-narrative of American power—the underlying assumption that the United States plays a good role in the world. Nothing in this residue will go beyond these 'bounds of acceptability' (Chomsky, 1989: 45). As such, fundamental contentions are taboo, such as that the United States conducts its foreign policy for the benefit of its powerful constituent interests rather than for moral reasons, and that it is a 'terrorist' state (Chomsky, 2003: 258), 'rogue' state (Chomsky, 2005), or 'failed' state (Chomsky, 2011). In turn, there is an unacknowledged assumption by the United States and its media of 'worthy' victims (the United States and its allies) and 'unworthy' victims (those who suffer as a result of the actions of the United States and its allies), which can be measured most strikingly by the quantity and quality of coverage (Herman and Chomsky, 2002: 37–86).

By now, several theorists have applied the model successfully to media in other countries and scenarios (Herring and Robinson, 2003; Doherty,
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First filter: Ownership
Second filter: Advertising
Third filter: Sourcing
Fourth filter: Flak
Fifth filter: Dominant ideology

Residue: With extremely rare exceptions, all material assumes US benevolence or is otherwise meaningless distraction from the victors and victims of politics. Herman and Chomsky use quantitative methods and paired examples to demonstrate this.

Figure 7.1 Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky’s ‘Propaganda Model’ (1988)

2005; Phelan, 2006; Jensen, 2007; Hearns-Branaman, 2009) and there is a case for applying it to different media products (Alford, 2009; 2011; Pedro, 2011: 8). In fact, Chomsky tacitly agrees when he says that the avoidance of ‘serious media critique right across the board is one respect in which the work that Ed Herman and I have done is really defective’, adding that such aspects of social life are ‘major part[s]…of the whole indoctrination and propaganda system’ (2003a: 100).

In a previous work, I have made the case that the PM can be applied to Hollywood (2009) and that the proposed objections to this endeavour can be dismissed (2011). David Edwards of Media Lens sees the PM as being broadly applicable across cultures, even including the classics, when he argues that Shakespeare, Plato, and Orwell fit the predictions (2000: 38–41).

Are we therefore at a point where we can adopt a Screen Entertainment Propaganda Model, which can be applied across the screen entertainment industries? This chapter explores the possibility, focusing on Hollywood cinema, network television, and video-gaming. In doing so, it illustrates and evaluates not just whether the model can reasonably be appropriated across media but also the value and limitations of the PM. This raises the bar for the model. The chapter is not just asking whether the model can offer insights