

Abstract

The bachelor's thesis *The American Media's Failure before the Iraq War in 2003* deals with the media's uncritical coverage of the threat posed by Iraqi program of weapons of mass destruction. The thesis analyses American print media coverage in period after the attacks of September 11, 2001 until the beginning of the Iraq War in March 2003. It seeks to determine the cause of this major crisis in the history of American journalism. The thesis is divided into three sections. The first part deals with intensive pro-war campaign under the Bush administration in an attempt to achieve political and social consent for the invasion to Iraq. The political marketing campaign consisted of the manipulation of WMD intelligence, escalation of rhetoric about the danger that Iraq posed to the United States and speculations about Iraqi support of terroristic organisations. The second section of the thesis is dedicated to a comparative content analysis of prewar coverage at *The New York Times* and newspapers published by *The Knight Ridder*. The final part traces the changes in American journalism in recent years. It explains how the quality of prewar coverage was influenced by these changes such as rising economic pressure, frequently quoted anonymous sources, unbalanced coverage in favor of the administration position and the exclusion of alternative points of view. Based on results of the content analysis, journalists' reflections and media theories, the thesis comes to the conclusion that the failure was determined by long term developments of American journalism but the main cause was another institutions' failure (the G.W. Bush administration and U.S. Congress) and domination of elite (official) sources in the media coverage. The final major factor for such a failure of media organizations across the spectrum was their following of elite newspapers' media agenda, especially that of *The New York Times*.