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Cambridge International AS and A Level

# Sociology

Coursebook

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# Introduction

*Cambridge International AS and A Level Sociology* has been designed and written to reflect the changes to the Cambridge International Syllabus (9699) introduced in 2013 for first examination in June and November 2014. In this respect, the text has two broad aims:

- 1 To help students understand exactly what is required by the structure of the new syllabus in terms of content and skills.
- 2 To provide content clearly focused on this structure; a central feature of the text is complete coverage of the AS and A Level syllabus.

This book aims to provide students with the knowledge and understanding required to succeed at both AS and A Level. To this end, the text can be used by students working individually or as part of a larger teaching group.

## Content

With one or two minor exceptions, the structure of each chapter reflects the order of information as it appears in the syllabus. This allows students to track their progress through the syllabus in a logical way. Slight adjustments have been made in the order of the AS chapter ‘Methods of research’ and the A Level chapter ‘Global development’ to provide a more logical teaching and learning flow. However, the syllabus is still fully covered in these sections.

Although the chapter structures follow that of the syllabus, students may find that the units are taught in a different order. Unit 2 (‘Theory and methods’) provides a basic grounding in sociology that is useful for students who are new to the subject. It introduces a range of perspectives and concepts that can be helpful in understanding other parts of the syllabus. For this reason, coverage of Unit 2 appears first in this book.

**AS Level** consists of two compulsory units:

Unit 1: The family (Chapter 5). Here, the content focuses on three related areas: the family and wider social change; changing family roles and relationships; and the social construction of age.

Unit 2: Theory and methods (Chapters 1–4). For convenience, this unit has been divided into four chapters. Together, these cover the syllabus requirements for the complete unit and are examined in a single paper.

**A Level** consists of four optional units. Students must study at least three of these:

Unit 3: Education (Chapter 6). First, this unit looks at education systems as part of wider social, economic and political contexts (for example, this section explains how education is linked to the economy and the state). The second part of this unit looks at what happens inside schools – the structures and processes that shape education itself and individuals within the education system.

Unit 4: Global development (Chapter 7). This unit investigates how and why societies around the world develop at different rates. In addition, the chapter examines different forms of inequality, based on concepts of class, age, gender and ethnicity. It also looks at the role of transnational organisations in cultural systems, and issues such as poverty and population growth.

Unit 5: Media (Chapter 8). This unit examines the development and role of both old and new media, from newspapers, through television and film to social networking. The chapter focuses on the significance of changing trends in ownership and control. It also looks at how different media represent social groups and the effect these media might have on personal and social behaviour.

Unit 6: Religion (Chapter 9). This unit studies religion in a social context, investigating different perspectives on religion and its relationship to social change. A range of religious organisations, from churches through new religious movements to new age and fundamentalist movements, are also examined. The chapter also includes an overview of secularisation and the debates that surround it.

Chapter 10 offers tips and techniques for exam preparation. These range from basic revision through assessment techniques, to exam structure, timing and planning. The chapter also identifies some common errors made by students during exams and how to avoid them.

# Features

In addition to providing complete coverage of the 9699 syllabus, this book includes a range of features designed to enhance students' understanding of the subject. These include:

- Key terms: the exam board has identified a number of key concepts for this syllabus. These are highlighted in green when they first appear in the text. Definitions of these terms are provided in boxes throughout the book.
- 'Test yourself' questions are short comprehension questions designed to consolidate students' understanding of the topic.
- Activities appear at the end of each section within a chapter. They are mainly intended to be group exercises to encourage discussion, apply learning to specific problems and introduce different forms of learning, such as visual memory techniques.

**AS and A Level Sociology**

**KEY TERM**  
**Life course analysis:** the examination of differences and changes over the course of an individual's lifetime. An individual's family experiences as a child and an adult are, for example, very different.

**TEST YOURSELF**  
 Give three examples of aging.

**ACTIVITY**  
 For each of the following groups, make a list of their permissions and demands in your society:  
 ■ children  
 ■ adults  
 ■ the elderly  
 Choosing an example from each group, what happens when people defy the expected permissions and demands?

**Childhood as a concept that is socially constructed**  
 Archer (2004) argues that every human society has developed a concept of childhood, but societies differ in their definitions of childhood and, by extension, adulthood. If childhood was a simple biological category, we would expect every society to see it in a similar way. The fact that they do not suggests that childhood is socially constructed rather than biologically determined.  
 The work of Archer has stimulated extensive debate about the changing nature of childhood and the status of children. Although some of Archer's claims have been questioned, his work helps to focus on a number of areas relating to the historical analysis of childhood. Archer argues that 'childhood' as a distinctive phase in social development is a consequence of modern societies. Childhood as both a social and biological category only came into existence around three centuries ago. Childhood is a special status, therefore, in that it is socially changeable and, more specifically, the change from pre-industrial to industrial society. While there were 'no adults' in pre-industrial society, they were neither called 'children', nor treated in ways we would currently

Portrait of a Young Girl with a Bird on her Finger and a Dog at her Feet, 1622. Why were children treated as 'little adults'?

**AS and A Level Sociology**

**Summary points**

- **For positivist approaches to sociological research, the key issues are:**
  - structure determines action
  - explanation
  - science
  - systematic observation
  - objective testing
  - quantitative methods
  - reliability
  - objectivity
  - neutrality
- **For interpretive approaches the key issues are:**
  - subjective meaning
  - interpretation
  - understanding
  - qualitative methods
  - validity
- **For realist approaches the key issues are:**
  - objectivity and subjectivity
  - structure and interpretation
  - holistic approach
  - methodological pluralism
- **Theoretical research considerations:**
  - Choice of topic
  - audience
  - values
  - personal
  - methodological
  - Choice of method
  - perspective
  - quantitative, qualitative, both?
  - data triangulation
  - reliability
  - validity
  - representativeness
- **Practical research considerations:**
  - Choice of topic is influenced by:
    - funding
    - access
    - co-operation
    - Choice of research influences by:
      - theory or purpose
      - topic
      - reliability and validity
      - time
      - funding
  - Ethical research considerations:
    - legality
    - physical
    - psychological
  - The value of different methods of research in the essential terms of:
    - reliability
    - validity
    - objectivity
    - representativeness
  - Methodological pluralism involves combining aspects of different research methodologies, such as quantitative and qualitative methods.
    - Triangulation
      - methodological: use or more
      - within-method
      - between-method
      - data: different sampling strategies
      - theoretical: structure and action

**Total available marks 75**

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# Chapter 8: Media

## Learning objectives

**The objectives of this chapter involve understanding:**

- national and global trends in media ownership and control
- Marxist and pluralist interpretations of the relative importance of media ownership and control
- Marxist and pluralist interpretations of the nature and role of the media, including concepts of mass society and mass culture
- economic, political and ideological factors affecting the selection and presentation of media content, including the concept of news values
- different perspectives on the relationship between the media and the state
- features, issues and processes surrounding the impact of new media on society
- modernist and postmodernist perspectives on the role of the media in the representation of social groups and ideas
- social patterns in listening, viewing and reading
- theories of direct, indirect and limited media effects and uses
- positive and negative media impacts in relation to behaviour, violence and deviance
- problems with researching media effects on audiences.

## Introduction

This chapter looks at different aspects of the media, from how it is defined, through new and old media to an assessment of its social effects. We initially focus on questions of media ownership and control and how this helps us understand national and global media processes;

this includes the relationship between the media and the state and the media's general role in society. This chapter also investigates media representation of social groups and how this relates to different theories of media effects.

## Ownership and control of the media

### Trends in the organisation and control of the media; ownership patterns

#### Defining the media

Before we examine trends in the organisation and control of the **media**, it is useful to explain and define the distinction between 'old' and 'new' forms of media.



#### KEY TERM

**Media:** channels of mass communication through which information is sent and received.

A medium is a 'channel of communication' – a way of sending and receiving information. When people read a newspaper, watch television or view a website, something is communicated in some way. Collectively, these channels represent media (the plural of medium).

The term 'media' usually refers to communication with large numbers of people. This is conventionally seen as 'one-to-many' communication: one person, such as the author of a newspaper article, simultaneously communicates to many people (the audience). Dutton et al. (1998) suggest that the media has a number of characteristics that set it apart from other types of communication, such as interpersonal communication that occurs on a one-to-one basis (for example, a telephone call). In the media, communication is:

- impersonal: the sender of the message does not know the receivers
- lacking in immediacy: the audience has no involvement with the production of a media message
- one-way: from the producer/creator to the consumer/audience
- physically and technologically distant: everyone receives the same intended message

- organised: it requires a vehicle, such as a television receiver, printed page or internet connection, which allows messages to be sent and received
- large-scale and simultaneous: the global audience for something like the football World Cup numbers hundreds of millions
- commodified: it comes at a price. You can watch the latest films if you can afford a television and a subscription to a satellite or cable company. The audience may also be the commodity that is bought and sold. For example, 'free-to-air' television programmes deliver a mass audience to advertisers.

These characteristics apply to 'old media', such as newspapers, magazines, books, television, radio and film. However, the situation is complicated and in some ways changed, by newer, computer-based technologies that do not fit easily into these categories. Mobile (cell) and smartphones or personal computers have the capacity for communication that is:

- one-to-one: such as email
- one-to-many: such as Facebook, Twitter or a blog
- many-to-many: what Shirky (2008) calls 'group conversations' that include things like peer-to-peer (p2p) networks that use software to link individual computers in a network to exchange information; this has diverse uses, from sharing work documents to downloading (illegal) copies of films, music and software.

This variety of ways of communicating is one of the defining characteristics of **new media**. However, one similarity between old and new media is the nature of ownership and control.



#### KEY TERM

**New media:** contemporary channels of communication characterised by their interactivity, individualisation and network capabilities.



How is new media different from old media?

### Owners

Media owners can be broadly characterised as a group that falls into two areas:

- Private ownership refers to companies that are run for profit by individuals, families or shareholders. Rupert Murdoch, for example, owns a controlling interest in News Corporation, a global media company that publishes newspapers, books, films and magazines, and broadcasts satellite TV programmes.
- State ownership involves government controls that differ between societies. In China, for example, the government directly oversees the content of state-run television and tightly regulates access to the internet. In other societies, public broadcasters have greater autonomy (independence and freedom of action).

The significance of ownership in this context is that owners have the potential to decide what sort of information an audience receives. This reflects a form of  **censorship**  that can be both direct and indirect. Private owners may decide not to publish information critical of their company, whereas state-owned companies may be subject to political control over what they can broadcast or publish.

### KEY TERM

**Censorship:** the deliberate suppression of communication or information.

**Controllers:** Controllers, such as the editor of a newspaper, manage a company on a daily basis. While they may be *shareholders* in the company – a notable trend in **media ownership**, especially at the higher levels of media management – they do not *own* the company for which they work.

### KEY TERM

**Media ownership:** economic control of a media organisation.

Different sociological interpretations of ownership and control place different levels of significance on this distinction.

### TEST YOURSELF

Identify three characteristics of old media.

### Trends

To understand trends in ownership and control in a global context we can identify two processes common to all forms of media behaviour in modern industrial societies: concentration and conglomeration.

**Concentration:** This refers to how the media is increasingly owned by a relatively small number of large corporations and powerful individuals. Over the past 50 years, for example, the trend has been for fewer media owners controlling larger corporations.

The concentration of ownership is also part of a long-term global trend. Compaine (2004), for example, notes that the global media market is dominated by seven giant corporations, including Disney, News International and Bertelsmann. McLiesh et al.'s (2001) examination of media in 97 countries found that most large media firms are owned by private families. The concentration of ownership is significant in terms of product diversity – consumers are offered a limited range of similar media products. However, recent concerns about concentration have focused on the extent to which it affects *information diversity*.

The availability of a wide range of products means very little if they all say much the same thing. McChesney (2000), for example, argues that having lots of different media products simply gives the 'appearance of choice' because they still only communicate a limited range of ideas. While satellite and cable television offer hundreds of different channels, their content is largely homogeneous, cheaply made and repetitive.

Compaine (2001) disputes this interpretation: the global trend is not necessarily for increased concentration because media organisations are not static entities; they develop, grow, evolve and disappear.

The global media companies that were dominant in the 1980s were not necessarily dominant in the 2000s. Fifteen years ago, Amazon did not exist, but today it is

one of the world's largest media outlets. Social networking companies are also a good illustration here. Founded in 2003, Myspace was the most visited social networking site in the world until 2008, when it was overtaken by Facebook, a company that did not exist until 2004. By 2013, Facebook was one of the most successful internet sites, with around 1 billion users, profits of around \$1 billion and a net worth of around \$50 billion. In 2011, Myspace was sold for \$35 million.

### TEST YOURSELF

Define the term 'media concentration', using an example to illustrate your answer.

### Conglomeration

Conglomeration is an ownership trend related to concentration. It involves the same company developing interests across different media through a process of diversification. One example of this type of **cross-media corporation** Fininvest is the media company owned by the former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. It has a diverse range of interests that include television, book, newspaper and magazine publishing. In terms of new media, Amazon, the world's largest bookseller, has diversified its interests over the last few years into areas such as publishing, with the development of the Kindle range of digital book readers, and book review websites, with the acquisition of Goodreads in 2013.



#### KEY TERM

**Cross-media corporation:** private or public company that owns different types of media, such as a newspaper, television channel and film production studio.

### ACTIVITY

*In groups, choose a particular aspect of the media (such as newspapers, magazines and television) and use the internet to research media ownership in your society. All groups will then need to compare their findings across different media (e.g. newspapers and television) to see 'who owns what'.*

*What does your research tell you about media concentration and conglomerations in your society?*

## Different perspectives on the relationship between ownership and control of the media

This section examines two opposing views on the significance of trends in media organisation and control: Marxist and pluralist.

### Marxism

According to traditional Marxism, capitalist society involves a distinction between two social classes: the proletariat (or subject class) and the bourgeoisie (or ruling class). The fact that the ruling class owns and controls ideological (or cultural) institutions gives it the power to decisively shape how people view the social world. In contemporary societies, the media is the most important and influential ideological institution. Whoever owns the media, therefore, exercises a great deal of power. In some ways this reflects a determinist approach: the media is seen as a powerful agency that can shape, and in some instances, fully decide people's general thoughts and behaviours.

The media is part of the political and ideological superstructure in capitalist society. Its role is to propagate values that support the *status quo*, shaping how people see the world through a range of legitimating ideas. These may include:

- support for capitalism
- rationalising and justifying social inequalities
- defending the concept of private property
- the private ownership of profits
- negatively labelling alternatives to capitalism.

The media is a tool or instrument used by a ruling class to teach an **ideology** that favours the interests of bourgeoisie. Milliband (1969) argues that this is possible because members of the ruling class share a common economic and cultural background, which is created and reinforced through educational and family networks.



#### KEY TERM

**Ideology:** system of related beliefs.

From this viewpoint, owners ultimately control a company, while managers are employed to oversee day-to-day operations. A newspaper editor may control the stories that appear and be responsible for hiring and firing employees for example, but the owner dictates the political opinions expressed in the paper, the type of audience it aims to reach and, most importantly, who

is or is not employed in managerial roles. Ownership and control, therefore, are part of a hierarchical system. Both are necessary features of capitalist corporations, but owners are always the dominant force in this relationship.

Owners and controllers use the media to manipulate how subject classes see the world to create the belief that societies work in the interests of all rather than the interests of a few. In this way the media creates a 'false consciousness': the lower classes co-operate with a ruling class in their own exploitation and against their own interests. In the UK, for example, following the global financial crisis in 2008, the media has characterised recovery in terms of 'austerity' and the need for 'everyone to work together' to make sacrifices to pay off the national debt. From this perspective, therefore, the ability to control the type and quality of information people receive means a ruling class controls and broadly determines how people think.

**Evaluation:** Traditional Marxist approaches reflect a conspiratorial approach to the relationship between a ruling class and the media, in which the media is a 'willing tool' in the hands of the elite. However, this is not always the case, as the recent (2011) phone-hacking scandal at News International showed. The media is also critical of many forms of capitalist behaviour, from 'greedy bankers' to environmental crimes.

The idea that a ruling class is a coherent body with members who all share the same interests has also been questioned, in particular by neo-Marxist approaches. If financial capitalists, such as bankers, and industrial capitalists, such as manufacturers, do not have much in common, they are unlikely to use the media to present a unified view of the world to the rest of society.

The usefulness of concepts like a dominant ideology and false consciousness have also been questioned. People in contemporary democratic societies have a wide range of media choices that offer access to different economic, political and ideological viewpoints. The development of new media makes it increasingly difficult to see how the flow of information can be tightly controlled by a ruling class. The traditional Marxist approach also tends to portray media consumers as passive recipients of whatever owners want to publish.

### Neo-Marxism

The concept of class lies at the heart of neo-Marxist approaches to the relationship between ownership and control. However, Wright (1985) theorises class as a

dynamic system of shifting social relationships, rather than as a static classification system. This suggests that conflict, divisions and contradictions occur *within* a ruling class as well as *between* this class and other classes. These conflicts may be:

- economic – between different types of capital, such as financial/banking and manufacturing
- political – some parts of the British bourgeoisie support the European Community, while others do not
- ideological – some parts of the ruling class advocate liberal, free-market capitalism with little or no state involvement in economic affairs, while others are more interventionist, believing that governments should intervene at various times to support and regulate industries.

### Hegemony

This dynamic approach means that class associations can also accommodate ethnic and gender divisions. Individuals from some ethnic groups may be economically successful even if they do not see themselves as part of a (white) middle or upper class.

In addition, status groups such as professionals and intellectuals (the upper middle class) occupy what Poulantzas (1975) calls 'contradictory class positions'. These groups are neither wholly bourgeois nor wholly proletarian, and this is significant in understanding the relationship between media owners, controllers and audiences.

This approach, therefore, questions the idea that the behaviour of subject classes is directly manipulated through the media. For this to happen, a ruling class would need a level of cohesion that it simply does not have. The media is not without influence, but such influence is hegemonic not manipulative. The concept of **hegemony** is used to show how both owners and controllers in modern capitalist societies are locked into a mutually beneficial structural relationship based around economic profit:

- Owners must make profits if their business is to survive.
- Managers rely on profits for their jobs, salaries and lifestyles.



#### KEY TERM

**Hegemony:** leadership with the consent (real or implied) of those who are led.



Do media owners and their employees share similar values?

### Core values

According to this hegemonic view, owners and controllers have a common economic interest, expressed in terms of core values. For example, they both have a fundamental belief in capitalist economic systems. Although they necessarily share a common cause in promoting and preserving their core values through the media they do not always agree on the best way to promote and preserve such values.

Managers enjoy *relative autonomy* – the freedom to make certain decisions – because media corporations are too large and too complex to be easily controlled by an owner on a daily basis. Therefore, owners employ managers who can be trusted to reflect their views. Editors who insist on ignoring their employer's interests are likely to find themselves unemployed. As long as the output is legal, the key principle is profitability; some owners may not care too much about the behaviour and activities of their media managers as long as they make a good profit.

Hegemonic control suggests that beliefs are not simply imposed 'from above' by a ruling class. Strinati (1995), for example, argues that dominant groups maintain their position through the 'consent' of subordinate groups. This consent that may be actively manufactured through what Althusser (1971) calls *ideological state apparatuses* (ISAs) that involve **socialisation** processes, both personal and political, which are carried out by cultural institutions such as the media.



### KEY TERM

**Socialisation:** process in which people are taught and learn the various forms of behaviour consistent with their membership of a particular culture.

**Evaluation:** Criticism of neo-Marxist approaches focuses on the hegemonic significance of the media and the specific ideological role of cultural institutions in capitalist societies. The development of new global media forms limits the ability of national governments or private owners to control information as they may once have done. In the digital age, most populations are no longer restricted to information which they receive passively from the media. Not only can people 'search the globe' for information but, as Weinberger (2012) argues, 'For every fact on the internet, there is an equal and opposite fact'. These ideas question the effectiveness of the media's ideological role.

### TEST YOURSELF

Identify and explain the key differences between traditional and neo-Marxist explanations of the relationship between media ownership and control.

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### Pluralism

An alternative approach, known as pluralism, stresses how social groups compete against one another in the economic marketplace as they pursue their own interests. Such competition may be:

- economic – different newspaper groups competing for readers
- ideological – different political groups competing to promote their views.

Media owners are potentially powerful players, because they can demand that their views are expressed. However, pluralist approaches argue that control of the media is increasingly in the hands of what Galbraith (1967) calls a 'technocratic managerial elite', who, however well remunerated, remain *employees* rather than employers. Many media organisations are owned by shareholders rather than individuals. Where no single shareholder has overall control of a company, directors and managers make all the important day-to-day business decisions.

### Managerialism

Burnham (1941) called this change in control a managerial revolution based, in part, on commercial necessity – the needs of consumers. In a competitive world, the consumer exercises a huge (collective) influence over organisational behaviour. If consumers do not like what they are being offered, then an organisation must respond to consumers' demands or risk being driven out of business by other companies who are more willing to adapt. In this situation, the ideological content of media messages is less important than profit. And where media companies are forced to compete for customers, power really lies in the hands of consumers.

**Globalisation** has encouraged diversity and competition through what Davis and McAdam (2000) call a 'new economic shift'. Media corporations have become networks operating across national boundaries, with flexible organisational structures that allow them to respond to new technological developments. These organisations normally have shareholders, such as banks and pension funds, but they rarely have individual owners. Even an organisation such as Facebook, originally developed and owned by a very small group of employees, including the creator, Mark Zuckerberg, is now owned by a wide group of institutional and individual shareholders.

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#### KEY TERM

**Globalisation:** various processes – economic, political and cultural – that occur on a worldwide basis.

Modern media conglomerates can therefore be seen as diverse organisations that operate in a wide range of different markets and cater for an equally wide range of consumer needs and demands. This economic situation results in many different types of publication, from print through broadcasting to digital media. A further boost to media diversity involves the rapid growth of cheap, widely available computer technology, from desktop computers to smartphones. These are built on a web-based distribution system (the internet) that has:

- reduced the costs of media production
- made entry into the media marketplace open to all
- given all producers access to a global audience.

### TEST YOURSELF

Identify and explain two differences between Marxist and pluralist explanations of the relationship between media ownership and control.

**Evaluation:** Although pluralist arguments about the changing nature of media markets and organisations have some validity, especially in the context of new media and the rise of cheap, accessible, global distribution systems such as the internet, they have been criticised for several reasons.

Firstly, the separation of ownership and control in modern media conglomerates is overstated. At the senior levels of global corporations, 'managers' are 'employees' in name only. Murdock and Golding (1977), for example, argue that the separation of interests between owners and controllers is more apparent than real, since managers often own the companies they control. They think and act in much the same way as the individual media owners of the past.

Secondly, major shareholders still exert control over a business. Rupert Murdoch, for example, has a 35% share in News Corporation, the parent company of a range of subsidiary companies such as News International. This effectively gives Murdoch control. Curran (2000) acknowledges that the power of media owners 'is qualified and constrained' by a range of people and interests that include:

- consumers
- employees
- the suppliers of various forms of content
- regulators
- rival producers
- the wider cultural beliefs of a society.

Curran also argues that owners remain the most powerful actors in these organisations. They may not personally oversee the content of the media they own, but they are unlikely to employ managers who are opposed to their social and economic interests.

Thirdly, although the internet makes it more difficult for owners to control what their audience sees, reads and hears, old media may actually have far larger audiences than most new media. Logan (2010) notes that while there are around 175 million unique blogs on the internet, 'the average number of readers of any given blog is seven.' More significantly in this context, some forms of old media may also be trusted more as sources of information.



Are owners like Rupert Murdoch the most powerful actors in media organisations?

Finally, pluralists argue that media diversity guarantees consumer choice, but competition does not automatically mean media diversity. Economies of scale, for example, mean the majority of consumer demands can be satisfied by a few giant corporations wielding great economic, political and ideological power on a global scale. Nor does this depend whether ownership of these corporations is concentrated in the hands of a single individual or a large number of anonymous shareholders. The diversity of web-based media may also be overstated. Giant corporations such as Apple, through its iTunes store, and Amazon increasingly exert tight controls over what is published. Apple directly controls what may or may not be sold through its online store. If a song is deemed unacceptable it is excluded from sale. Individual song titles and lyrics are also strictly censored. As iTunes currently has a 66% share of the global download market, the ability to exclude products from sale gives Apple significant control of media content.

## Pluralist and Marxist theories of the nature and role of the media

### Traditional Marxism

Traditional Marxism sees the media as a significant ideological institution in capitalist society. An important dimension of the media's role is to shape how people think by controlling the nature, extent and type of information on which they make judgements. In this manipulative model, owners and controllers use the media as a tool to influence public opinion. They promote a particular ideological world view that explicitly favours the interests of a ruling class.

A second dimension to this role is the promotion and policing of the values of capitalist society. Marxists therefore see the media as an increasingly important

agency of social control, expressed through two significant processes:

- Those whose views reflect the interests of owners are given access to the media.
- Those with alternative or contradictory views are generally denied such access.

Ideas favourable to a ruling class are continually highlighted and promoted, while opposing views are ignored, misrepresented or marginalised. Oppositional ideas are represented in ways that suggest they are not to be taken seriously:

- The Glasgow Media Group (1976) showed how UK television news broadcasts portrayed owners positively and trade unions negatively during industrial actions in the 1980s.
- Hussain (2002) documents how, in Denmark, ethnic-minority groups suffered 'exclusion and marginalisation in the mainstream media' that used 'openly anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim' language.
- Petersen (2008) argues: 'Every major US newspaper and TV news show has a business section, but not a labor section. If the stock market drops, it's "Stop the presses". But if the infant mortality rate rises, it's questionable if it'll even make the papers. If you created a blueprint for an apparatus that erased critical thought, there's none more efficient than corporate media'.

These examples point to another manipulative process in which marginalised social groups, such as immigrants, minorities and the unemployed, are represented as the cause of social problems. This 'scapegoating' is designed to create divisions within and between groups and to deflect the blame for social problems away from the behaviour of the elite. The general role of the media, therefore, is to ensure that the views and interests of the elite are presented in ways that encourage people to accept social and economic inequality as 'normal and right'.

**Mass society:** The roots of this perspective are found in the Frankfurt School, which developed ideas about the role of the media in *totalitarian societies* (those ruled by a political dictatorship, such as Germany in the 1930s) based on the concept of a mass society. As Ross (1995) notes, this is a type of society in which 'the masses' are characterised by:

- geographic isolation – a lack of daily face-to-face contact

- social isolation – a lack of participation in larger groups or organisations and the failure to develop strong community ties
- limited social interaction – people increasingly see themselves as ‘anonymous individuals’ who are not part of a functioning social group, community or society.

**Mass culture:** Ross argues that where a society is characterised by ‘demographically heterogeneous [mixed] but behaviourally homogenous [similar] groups’, the media is used, by both individuals and powerful elites, to create a sense of community and culture. A mass society develops a mass culture. This is sometimes called ‘popular’ or ‘low’ culture to distinguish it from the **high culture** of the social elite. Mass culture joins together mass society because it provides the ‘things in common’, such as values and beliefs, that socially isolated individuals share. However, because mass culture is created through the media it can be manipulated to reflect the interests of a ruling class.

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**KEY TERM**

**High culture:** the idea that some cultural products and practices are *superior* to others: ‘the art, music and literature preferred by the well-educated elite’.



Does new media encourage or discourage social isolation?

A contemporary variation of this argument links behaviour in late of postmodernity to mass communication channels such as the internet. Lang and Lang (2009), for example, note how the internet

involves communication processes that are both physically and socially distant. Instant communication can occur between people who are in different countries and who may know little about the person with whom they are communicating. They may not even know their real name. The features of a mass society can be exploited by powerful elites, from governments and political groups to public-relations specialists. In the past, it was difficult to directly influence a socially isolated mass of individuals in democratic societies. Now, Lang and Lang suggest that ‘The internet, though open to many uses, has this potential’, mainly because people ‘at best, have a vague awareness of the numerous but nameless others attracted by the same object or media content, who adopt the same fashion, behave in a similar way, or move in a parallel direction’. This suggests that people may be open to various forms of **media manipulation** through their involvement in new media networks.

**KEY TERM**

**Media manipulation:** various ways in which the media attempts to influence and control how information is received and understood by an audience.

**TEST YOURSELF**

Suggest two features of mass society.

**Neo-(Hegemonic) Marxism**

From this perspective the role of the media reflects the complexity of class relationships and interests in contemporary societies. The media’s ideological role is considered in terms of how it creates and sustains a broad political consensus around a set of core values, rather than how it manipulates people’s behaviour directly. In this way, the media can reflect a variety of different opinions while simultaneously absorbing critical views that may threaten the stability of the social system.

Neo-Marxists do not believe that the media’s ideological role is to provide a ‘common culture for the masses’. They argue that concepts of mass society and mass culture are both unrealistic and over-simplified, because in contemporary societies the range of behavioural choices is

too great to be simply and easily manipulated. The media's role, therefore, is considered in terms of how it helps to maintain the *status quo* by policing and protecting core social values.

A key idea here is that the media plays a crucial role in creating a consensus that allows people to be socialised into core values. People must be made to accept the values of their society or, if they try to reject them, be powerless to change them.

**Manufacturing consensus:** Traditionally, producing a media product for a mass audience was restricted by the cost of creating, marketing and distributing a newspaper, film or television programme. However, the development of new media has made some forms of access, such as blogging or self-publishing, easier and cheaper. This presents a problem for traditional Marxists, because it means that a much wider range of views can be heard. However, hegemonic Marxists argue that ruling elites can absorb, accommodate and even promote information diversity through 'hierarchies of trust' (that is, the faith people have in the truth of different forms of media).

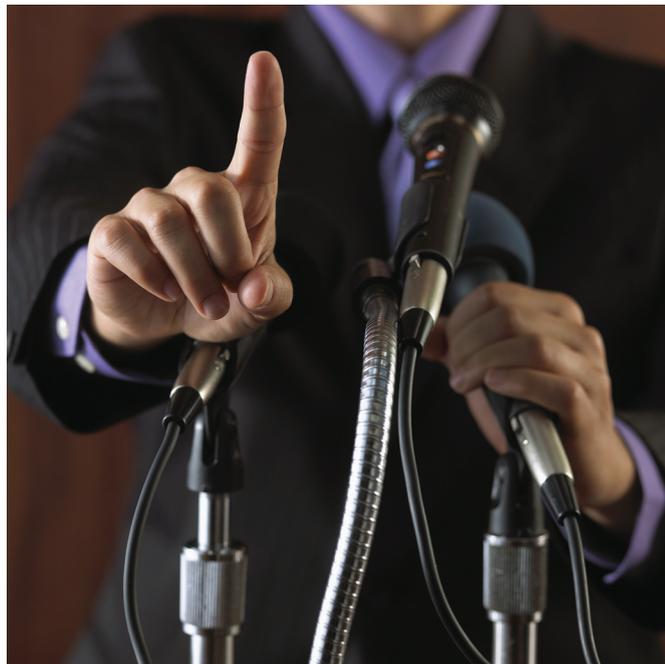
**Agendas:** In this sense, therefore, the media holds certain beliefs about core values that are taken for granted. In so doing, the media sets the agenda for debate; some things are simply not up for discussion. In the, for example, no major media corporation discusses economic organisation in anything other than capitalist terms.

While ensuring that certain core values are questioned, the media also steers public opinion in particular ways. Just as advertisers try to convince people to buy one product rather than another, so does the media through 'preferred readings'. This is something the writer of a newspaper article, for example, wants their audience to believe without noticing that their opinions are being influenced. One way this is achieved is through the use of headlines and subheading, which effectively tell the reader how they should interpret an article. Another way is to use captions to tell an audience what a picture means. At worst, this control is a form of **propaganda**.



#### KEY TERM

**Propaganda:** selective, partial and one-sided forms of communication designed to influence the attitudes of an audience towards a particular point of view.



Those who control the media have the power to disseminate one political viewpoint across an entire society.

#### Pluralism

Pluralism covers a range of perspectives on the role of the media that can be loosely characterised by their rejection of Marxist interpretations. Pluralist perspectives share a number of general beliefs about the role of the media, although they are expressed in different ways and with different levels of emphasis.

One characteristic of these approaches is the significance they place on information diversity. Even where old-media forms are highly concentrated, pluralists believe that there is still a range of views available. Such diversity is enhanced through the development of new media, where relatively low start-up, production and distribution costs have created a proliferation of media outlets. In this respect, diversity is related to choice – not just in the range of different media and views, but also in terms of consumers.

Diversity and choice come together in the sense that it is media consumers, not producers, who are central to the relationship between the media and ideology. If a producer does not offer the things people want to read, watch or listen to, that company will go out of business. This 'discipline of the marketplace' – finding ways to give people what they want – is driven by the fact that owners compete to win market share and create profits. This, in turn, creates innovation and diversity. Owners and

controllers are continually looking for ways to improve their product:

- technologically, such as digital television, smartphones and digital books
- qualitatively, such as developing new types of programming or video gaming.

This drive for innovation gives audiences an important position in relation to the media. Media audiences are not *passive*, simply buying whatever owners provide, but *active*. They buy what they like and ignore the things that do not fit their lifestyles or beliefs. In this respect, new media simply increases the choice available to consumers on a global scale. There are, for example, websites that reflect most political and ideological opinions.

In this sense, pluralist perspectives reverse the traditional Marxist argument that audiences consume whatever owners decide to give them. Instead, media owners demand from their employees whatever consumers want. This places media controllers in a unique and potentially powerful position. Part of their job is to seek out and respond to consumer demand and if they do this successfully, all sections of society are satisfied. Owners and consumers each get what they want: profits for the former, entertainment and information for the latter.

Overall, therefore, the role of the media is to provide consumers with the information and services they demand. A diverse range of media exists and people can choose from different sources of information. This that applies to both old and new media; internet access, for example, means people can get information from both national and global sources. A variety of media reflecting a range of views also means that some sections will represent the interests of 'ordinary people' and the activities of the powerful can be scrutinised, exposed and criticised.

### TEST YOURSELF

Suggest two ways in which 'pluralism reverses the Marxist argument' about the role of the media.

## Different explanations of the processes of selection and presentation of media content

Explanations of the processes involved in the **selection and presentation of media content** relate to what Barrat (1992) calls the 'social context of media production'.

### ACTIVITY

Write a caption for this picture that portrays the behaviour in:

- a a positive light
- b a negative light.



Media content is socially constructed because it involves the selection of some types of information for presentation in particular ways. We can explore in terms of economic, political and ideological factors.

### KEY TERM

**Selection and presentation of media content:** the various ways in which media content is chosen (selection) and given (presented) to an audience in order to influence their understanding of an issue, idea or group.

### Economic factors

Production and distribution costs, especially for old media, influence factors such as news gathering. A national media company, for example, has more resources at its disposal than a local one. However, both companies use agencies such as the Press Association or Reuters, which collect and sell stories collected from a variety of sources to lower the cost of reporting. In terms of distribution networks, Peters (2001) argues that some companies, such as BSkyB in the UK, 'use their position as gatekeepers to distribute mainly

information and programme services of their own media group, thus limiting free access’.

Production values relate to the *quality* of the product presented to an audience. The BBC, for example, routinely spends more on its content than small satellite TV stations. As a result, it produces more varied content with higher production values. Programming costs also vary between different forms of media and this can affect how content is selected and presented. Rewriting corporate press releases, for example, is much cheaper than investigative reporting. Similarly, two people sitting on a sofa chatting is less expensive than producing original TV drama.

The delivery of some physical media, such as newspapers, magazines and books, also places limits on content. Print media, for example, has space restrictions, with additional costs related to the production of extra pages that do not apply to new media such as websites. Technological costs are another factor that affects both production and distribution. A global media company can select programming from a wide range of sources. Individuals producing small websites or blogging about events in their local community do not have such a wide range of sources.

Competition between media can affect the selection and presentation of content in two main ways:

- *Intra-medium* competition involves companies working within the same medium capturing or losing different kinds of content.
- *Inter-media* competition involves content being tailored to the strengths of a particular medium. Music, for example, is packaged differently on radio than on websites, where a visual dimension can be added.

Most forms of privately owned media rely on advertising income in order to make a profit. As such, they are unlikely to behave in ways that upset their principal advertisers. Chomsky (1989), for example, documented how pressure from US advertisers resulted in articles and programmes being withdrawn or ‘amended’. Similarly, Lee and Solomon (1990) point to examples of pressure by advertisers: ‘In 1989, Domino’s Pizza cancelled its advertising on *Saturday Night Live* [an American satirical TV programme] because of the show’s alleged anti-Christian message’.

### Political factors

While political factors in democratic societies may not have a direct influence on the selection and presentation of media content, many governments lay down basic rules governing acceptable and unacceptable content. China,

for example, operates strict censorship rules across a range of media and subjects; news outlets are banned from mentioning events such as the 1989 Tiananmen Square democracy protests, and web content unacceptable to the state is also blocked.

Democratic governments rarely use direct media censorship, except in ‘national emergencies’. However, various forms of covert censorship often occur. Many governments, including the UK and the USA, do not allow state secrets to be published. More usually, media content is *regulated* through a variety of legal rules covering areas such as publishing, broadcasting and advertising.

Media content is also covered by legal restrictions on what can and cannot be published, relating to things such as:

- copyright – whether or not something like a book, song or film can be freely copied and distributed
- libel – what can be legally written about someone.

### Ideological factors

In the previous section, we examined the role of the media through a Marxist/pluralist duality. These ideas provide a theoretical context for understanding ideological factors related to the selection and presentation of media content.

‘News’ is not simply something that waits to be discovered. What counts as news is socially constructed and determined – an event only becomes news when someone with the power to apply this label decides it is newsworthy. This, in turn, is determined by ideological rules that classify events in particular ways – as ‘news’ or ‘not news’, for example. These rules are guided by a set of organisational demands, or ‘news values’.

### News values

Chibnall (1977) defines these news values as ‘the criteria of relevance which guide reporters’ choice and construction of newsworthy stories, learnt through a process of informal professional socialisation’. Thus these values are determined by organisational needs that translate into the professional codes used by editors and journalists to guide their assessment of media content. In this respect, particular news values directly influence how and why certain types of information are selected and presented as news (Table 8.1).

### TEST YOURSELF

Define the term ‘news values’, using two examples to support your definition.

News values	Meaning
Galtung and Holmboe Ruge (1973)	
Frequency	Visual media feature fast-moving stories with lots of action.
Size	Scale and importance; larger = more newsworthy.
Unambiguous	The easier an event is to simplify, the more likely it will be defined as news. Complex events reduced to simple, clear, issues ('good' and 'bad').
Meaningfulness	The closer the fit between an event and an audience's cultural background, the more newsworthy it will be.
Consonance	The ability to predict or want something to happen makes it news. If the predicted events do not happen, that is also news.
Continuity	Stories need a context, such as a past and a future.
Chibnall (1977)	
Immediacy	'News' is what is happening now.
Adventure	The more dramatic an event, the more likely it is to be news.
Personalisation	'Important people' (such as celebrities or politicians) are given more attention and prominence in different media. Stories also have more value if they have a 'human interest'.
Titillation	Sex sells some newspapers, magazines and TV programmes.
Convention	Events can be explained in ways that are familiar to an audience.
Structured access	Reporters and experts have more opportunity to define the meaning of an event. Hierarchies of credibility mean greater importance is given to some definers or news than others.
Novelty	Unusual or rare events are more newsworthy.
Lanson and Stephens (2003)	
Weight	An event's significance in relation to other, current, stories.
Controversy	Arguments and debates increase newsworthiness.
Usefulness	Does the story help people understand the meaning of something?
Educational value	Extent to which people are taught something.

Table 8.1 Selection of different news values.

### Theories

For pluralists, news values are evidence of consumer choice and diversity because they reflect the demands of the audience. For example, people who read the *Times of India* do not want pictures of topless women or trivial stories about minor American celebrities. This idea can be extended to all forms of media content. The news values of perezhilton.com, for example, reflect an audience demand for celebrity trivia.

For Marxists, news values are evidence of how audiences are shaped and manipulated – they learn to want whatever the media decides is newsworthy. From this perspective, news values are shaped by the ideological demands of owners. This can be linked to the argument that while owner intervention is subtle and indirect.

Owners offer 'guidance' and 'discussion' with senior editors on issues such as hiring journalists who reflect the owner's views.

News values, therefore, are linked to the political and economic beliefs of owners, and they broadly determine the overall political stance of a newspaper, magazine, TV channel or website. This, in turn, is linked to how media producers influence audience demands.

### Agenda setting

In a media organisation, the editor is responsible for ensuring that the news agenda set by owners is followed. The editor is also responsible for making sure that journalists understand and conform to organisational news values. **Agenda setting** concerns decisions about

what and what not to report. Where a media company relies on advertising for its profitability, agenda setting also includes keeping advertisers happy. In the UK the closure of the *News of the World* in 2011 was partly prompted by the catastrophic withdrawal of advertising it suffered after it was discovered that journalists from the newspaper had hacked the mobile phone of a murdered schoolgirl.



### KEY TERM

**Agenda setting:** neo-Marxist concept that argues that decisions made by editors and owners about what and what not to report 'set the agenda' for how the general public receives and perceives news.

### Legitimizing values

While editors play an important **gate-keeping** role content selection does not end there. The role of journalists, for example, is not simply to gather and report the news. They interpret the meaning of an event for their audience. Hall (1980) argues that journalists offer a preferred reading, one aspect of which, Chibnall suggests, is to legitimate values: positive and negative ideas that provide cultural cues that 'tell' an audience how to interpret meanings. In this respect, positive/legitimate and negative/illegitimate values structure how an audience reads media content (Table 8.2).



### KEY TERM

**Gate-keeping:** the ability to limit access to the media. An editor's gate-keeping role, for example, involves making decisions about what counts as 'news' as well as policing the news values of particular organisations.

Positive values	Negative values
Consensus	Conflict
Moderation	Extremism
Order	Disorder
Honesty	Corruption
Communication	Spin
Good	Evil
Democracy	Dictatorship

Table 8.2 Positive and negative legitimating values.

Source: Chibnall (1977)

### TEST YOURSELF

Briefly explain how journalists use legitimating values to tell an audience how to read a news story.

### Discourse

Fiske (1987) defines a 'discourse' as a way of representing the world from a particular viewpoint. In other words, a discourse reflects the ideas, beliefs and values of specific, powerful groups. Discourse is generally used by postmodernists to show how the media creates a framework for audience interpretation. Making certain values appear legitimate for example, structures how an audience receives information and, by so doing, shapes how such information is understood. Part of the purpose of a news discourse is to define the concept of news. Once this occurs, further refinements take place, including defining the meaning of certain things such as 'good or evil'. The definition of meaning indicates to an audience how they are supposed to interpret something and, in some instances, determines their response to whatever is being presented as news.

An example here is Cohen's (1972) concept of **folk devils**, people who are believed to threaten the established moral order. While different societies produce different folk devils, examples include:

- the poor, constructed in ways that blame poverty on the individual
- welfare claimants who 'play the system' to support 'leisure lifestyles'
- immigrants who 'fail to integrate' into a dominant culture
- terrorists who threaten 'our way of life'.



### KEY TERM

**Folk devils:** individuals and groups singled out for special attention and blame because they are seen to represent a challenge or threat to the existing moral order.

Folk devils are a way of creating a sense of social solidarity in a population by identifying people 'not like us'; they are 'outsiders' or 'the Other'. The selection and presentation of relatively powerless groups as folk devils in a news discourse is generally done in the context of a moral panic (see below).

### ACTIVITY

*Using a selection of newspapers, identify the news values they employ. Do different types of newspaper aimed at different audiences use different news values?*

## Debates about the relationship between the media and the state

Debates about the relationship between the state and the media occur between three main groups:

- Marxists, who see the media as either an instrument of the state or as an institution whose beliefs and interests are closely aligned to a ruling class and its control of state institutions.
- Pluralists, who generally argue that the media in most societies is relatively free from state control. The media enjoys a level of autonomy, particularly in capitalist democracies, that leaves it free to criticise the activities of the powerful or pursue ideas that go against the particular interests of governments and political parties.
- Postmodernists, who argue that the increasingly global nature of the media makes it largely immune from the control of nation states.

### Marxism

Eriksen (2004) argues, that the state is not a 'neutral framework for struggle and compromise'. Rather, state power is directed towards promoting and maintaining values favourable to a ruling class. It pursues this objective in two main ways:

- 1 Through its 'monopoly of violence', the power of the state is used to maintain unequal class relationships, either directly for instrumental Marxists such as Milliband (1973), or indirectly for hegemonic Marxists such as Poulantzas (1975)
- 2 Through its ability to exert ideological control over a population. In this context, the media is, again directly or indirectly, an agency of state control. Althusser (1971), for example, sees the media as an **ideological state apparatus (ISA)**; the state attempts to directly assert the interests of a ruling class through an interlocking relationship between the political and economic members of this class. Milliband believes that this class shares a common cultural background and economic interest; hegemonic Marxists such as Poulantzas, on the other hand, suggest that the media enjoy a *relative autonomy* from ruling class control.



### KEY TERM

**Ideological state apparatus (ISA):** Marxist concept that argues that institutions such as the media propagate values favourable to the interests of a ruling class in capitalist societies.

The media may advocate ideas and policies that go against the particular, short-term interests of a ruling class, but in the long term their behaviour is closely aligned with the economic and political interests of the bourgeois class of its owners and controllers. In this respect, the role of the media is one of 'policing capitalist values' to maintain and reproduce capitalism as an economic system. If this involves making concessions to the working class, such as a minimum wage or legal trade unions, they must be made in order to ensure the stability of capitalist society.

Glasberg (1989) sees this general position in terms of 'state capture', the idea that 'capitalists control key positions within the political structure to attain their goals and further their interests'. The media is only separated from the state by its specific functions. Owners and controllers recognise their common economic, political, and ideological interests as an integral part of the bourgeoisie. As such, they can be trusted to act in ways that reflect those interests. This ideological role, therefore, involves such things as promoting core values that:

- justify social inequality
- marginalise dissent
- marginalise alternatives to capitalism
- socialise exploited groups to accept their exploitation
- scapegoat 'minority groups' – both ethnic and class – as a way of setting one section of the working class against another.

**Mechanisms:** The ideological relationship between the media and the state is based on three types of selective media mechanisms:

- Negative selection mechanisms exclude anti-capitalist ideas and proposals, such as worker control of the economy. These are rarely given prominence or serious consideration in the media.
- Positive selection mechanisms promote ideas favourable to a capitalist class. A recent (2013) UK example is the promotion of government welfare reforms as part of an 'austerity drive' to repay national debt created by the global banking crisis.
- Disguising selection mechanisms maintains the illusion that the media is neutral by suggesting that it reflects all points of view and the interests of 'society as a whole'. Antagonism to industrial action, for example, is frequently couched in terms of 'preventing public disorder'. By hiding the former, which might appear

partial and unreasonable, in the latter (no reasonable person could be in favour of public disorder), the media message is effectively disguised.



How does the state influence media content?

In modern capitalist societies, therefore, the state is rarely required to exercise direct control of the media, because it can usually be trusted to ‘do the right things.’ Instead, the state establishes legal rules and regulations that both preserve relative media autonomy – making it appear to be independent of state control – and set the boundaries for media behaviour in case some sections decide to exercise that autonomy.

### Pluralism

Pluralist approaches generally see the role of the state in capitalist societies as an ‘honest broker’ between various sectional interests. The state’s role is to mediate between these interests – to balance the interests of a media based on ideas such as freedom of speech with the interests of those whose activities are reported. This involves the idea of a representative state – one that reflects the interests of different, competing groups, and in so doing, represents the interests of society as a whole.

The state is neutral in terms of how it relates to different groups. It does not, for example, necessarily favour one group, such as a business elite, over another, such as trade unions. What the state does, however, is act to resolve conflicts between these groups. The state, therefore, consists of a set of politically neutral institutions, such as a civil service and judiciary, that can be directed, but not directly controlled, by governments to modify the behaviour of sections of society such as the media. As Held (1989) puts it: ‘The state becomes almost indistinguishable from the ebb and flow of bargaining and the competitive pressure of interests.’

The media’s role is to co-ordinate social resources, through the institutions and machinery of government, to maintain order in three ways:

- Politically – to ensure that where competing groups exist, the state sets out the conditions under which each can operate. For example, there are regulations governing fair competition and levels of media ownership. The objective, at least in capitalist democracies, is to ensure that all voices can be heard and interests represented. Where the media reflect a plurality and diversity of ideas and interests, the choice about which to consume is left to the individual.
- Legally – to regulate potential conflicts. The state acts to balance the interests of a free media with the interests of businesses, groups and individuals through laws relating to things like copyright and libel. Disputes between different interest groups, such as a newspaper and an individual or group, can also be settled legally.
- Socially – in the sense of maintaining the conditions under which different institutions, such as the media, can operate in an orderly way to fulfil their social functions, responsibilities and obligations.

More specifically, once the state has set and guaranteed certain behavioural boundaries, the media is free to act out its general role in pluralist societies. This role includes:

- helping to maintain democratic ideas and institutions through criticism and assessment of different political parties and policies
- checking the behaviour of political and economic elites by exposing things like corruption
- maintaining a separation between economic ownership of the media and political control.

### TEST YOURSELF

Suggest two differences between Marxist and pluralist explanations of the relationship between the media and the state.

### New-right approaches

New-right approaches are similar to pluralist approaches. However, they take particular issue with the role of government in relation to media ownership. Government ownership is seen to work against

the interests of consumers by distorting economic markets. Where public broadcasters are guaranteed funding from the taxpayer, they do not have to compete against private media corporations for viewers and revenue. From this perspective, government media ownership limits or removes competition at the expense of consumer choice.

The new right believes that processes such as media convergence, where different types of media organisation combine to create newer forms of media, should be encouraged. State regulation governing or preventing cross-media ownership stops companies developing these new technologies. Anything that hinders the working of economic markets is undesirable, because only free markets can deliver innovation and economic development. Although state regulation is generally something to be resisted, where some form of **media regulation** is required, this is normally expressed in two ways:

#### KEY TERM

**Media regulation:** the rules whereby governments attempt to control areas like media ownership and output.

- Self-regulation where, in terms of newspaper publishing, Meyer (2003) argues: 'Any infringement of self-regulation would not just erode the freedoms of the press, it would curtail the freedoms of the citizen, who will always depend on media uninhibited by both control by the state and deference to the establishment to protect their liberty.'
- Market discipline, which involves the idea that where consumers reject the ideological content of the media they will either not buy it or will seek out media that does fit their ideological requirements.

#### TEST YOURSELF

Suggest one way in which government ownership of the media may work against the interests of consumers.

#### Postmodernism

This approach represents a different view of the relationship between the state and the media, mainly because globalisation and the development of new globalised forms of media make any relationship problematic. McLuhan and Powers (1989) claim that

in a world which increasingly resembles a 'global village', the media cannot be subject to controls that restrict the free flow of ideas and information.



How is the world like a global village?

Where postmodernism differs from other perspectives is in the characterisation of information structures. Whereas modernism views information *hierarchically*, the flow is from producers at the top to consumers at the bottom, postmodernism sees it in terms of networks. Castells (1996) suggests that 'networks have become the dominant form of social organization'.

For this reason, power – in terms of control over the production and distribution of information – is no longer concentrated within *institutions*, such as the state or media, but within *social networks*, where it is both produced and consumed by the same people. Information, therefore, flows between different nodal points (people) within a network in ways that make it impossible to distinguish between producer and consumer. They are, increasingly, one and the same. This clearly makes state regulation difficult, if not impossible, on both a national and global scale.

Tuomi (2002) suggests that a significant feature of postmodern media is that content reflects interpretation; how different people in the network interpret information contributes to media development. The implication here is that we must not consider modernist concepts such as truth or falsity when thinking about the ideological role of the media and its relationship to the state, because all knowledge is ideological.

On a global scale, therefore, the media propagates, controls, organises, criticises, promotes and demotes (marginalises) a variety of competing narratives, all of which are true and all of which are false. In a situation

where knowledge, as Sarup (1989) argues, is ‘fragmented, partial and contingent’ (relative to all other forms of knowledge or dependent on your particular viewpoint) information cannot be tightly controlled by the state.

Information can, however, be *managed*. Just as some forms of old media, operating within particular national boundaries, attempt to organise information in line with a range of political, economic and ideological discourses promoted by the state, the same is true of the state itself. The state’s relationship with all forms of media becomes one of managing something – information and data – that cannot be safely and simply controlled as it perhaps once was.

### ACTIVITY

*‘Some state regulation and censorship of the media is necessary to ensure the physical and moral safety of its citizens.’ How might this statement be viewed from each of the following perspectives?*

## The impact of the ‘new media’ on society

We can consider the impact of new media by looking at the features that make it ‘new’, the issues raised by new media forms and the implications of changing technologies on economic, political and cultural behaviour.

### Features

As Socha and Eber-Schmid (2012) argue: ‘Part of the difficulty in defining New Media is that there is an elusive quality to the idea of new.’ Crosbie (2002) suggests that three features of new media make it qualitatively different from old media:

- New media cannot exist without the appropriate (computer) technology.
- Information can be personalised; individualised messages tailored to the particular needs of those receiving them can be simultaneously delivered to large numbers of people.
- Collective control means that each person in a network can share, shape and change the content of the information being exchanged.

As an example, Crosbie suggests ‘Imagine visiting a newspaper website and seeing not just the bulletins and major stories you wouldn’t have known about, but also the rest of that edition customized to your unique needs and interests. Rather than every reader seeing the same edition,

each reader sees an edition simultaneously individualized to their interests and generalized to their needs.’

New media can also be truly global in scope and reach. Older technologies like TV and film do of course have global features – the US and Indian film industries, for example, span the globe – but they are fundamentally local technologies. They are designed to be consumed by local audiences that just happen to be in different countries. In contrast, new media such as websites and social networks are global in intent. They enable global connections through the development of information networks based on the creation and exchange of information. A significant aspect of these global features is the ability to create and share text, images, videos and other content without being hindered by physical borders.

Essentially, new media has a different emphasis one that breaks down the conventional ‘old media’ producer–consumer relationship and reinvents it in ways that blur the boundaries. In networks such as Facebook and Twitter, the consumer is the producer. New media thus has much higher levels of interactivity between consumers and in terms of how users relate to different forms of media technology.



### KEY TERM

**Interactive media:** media, such as video games, that allow the user to influence the direction and flow of debates, actions and outcomes.

### Linearity

On one level, old media is a linear technology. Information, such as a film, song, newspaper/magazine article or television programme, has a start, middle and end and the consumer must follow this linear logic. New media, however, has the capacity to organise information differently, through a non-linear or nested logic – information placed inside other information. Hypertext, for example, allows information to be organised and explored in non-linear ways rather than, as Socha and Eber-Schmid argue, ‘simply following a straight order’. This gives the user, rather than the producer, the potential to control how information is received and developed.

On another level, new media connects all kinds of information – text, images, sound and video – in many different ways across a global network. A key feature, therefore, is interconnectedness, not just of information but also of people. A good example of this is the development of Wikipedia, a free non-linear online encyclopaedia created by its users and which anyone can edit.

New media also empowers its users by encouraging creativity. With old media, creativity resides with the producer, such as a director or author, and flows in one direction only – from producers to consumers. New media changes this flow of information. Whether it is digital publishing or social networks such as Flickr or YouTube, the consumer is also the producer.



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What are the advantages and disadvantages of linear/non-linear texts?

### TEST YOURSELF

Identify and explain two features of new media.

### Issues

The various features of new media raise a new set of issues for both producers and consumers. For example, the development of global computer networks has presented problems for media industries whose products are relatively easy to copy and distribute digitally. The development of peer-to-peer networks has led to the rise of global forms of intellectual property theft ('piracy'). Media conglomerates have responded to this in a range of ways:

- Legal prosecutions of individual offenders and attempts to shut down sites, such as Napster and Megaupload, from which consumers could download illegal copies of music, film and TV programmes.
- The development of new economic models. 'Freemium' models, for example, provide a free service, such as software or a game, but users then pay a premium

for 'added extras'. Popular Facebook games, such as Farmville, have successfully taken this approach.

A further issue is the unauthorised access to computers and networks ('hacking'). This involves:

- Governments: cyberwarfare, for example, is when governments engage in the politically motivated hacking of rival government computer networks for reasons that range from espionage to sabotage.
- Organisations: in 2010, the US government claimed that the cybertheft of copyrights and patents by China remained at 'unacceptable levels'.
- Individuals: viruses and malware designed to damage computers, extort money or steal information.

One of the main issues for consumers is personal privacy. Social media such as Facebook makes money through advertising, which can now be targeted to individuals through the sale of users' personal data to third parties. Users, therefore, exchange 'free' services for some loss of privacy. While corporations such as Facebook simply monitor how their network is used in terms of what an individual likes or dislikes, discusses or avoids in order to deliver adverts matched to these behaviours, Kosinski et al. (2013) have shown it is possible to accurately infer a wide range of personal information from an analysis of an individual's 'likes'. This includes information such as ethnicity, IQ, sexuality, substance use and political views.

In this respect, Socha and Eber-Schmid argue that new media is 'characterized by an astonishing and uncharted level of personal experience/exposure. Online companies and sites can track the content of personal emails and site visits in order to target advertisements on users'. There are also websites whose sole purpose is to compile and share personal data with web surfers. A further privacy issue is the rapid spread and persistence of online data. Once data is released into the wild of the web, whether in the shape of sites, blogs, tweets or tagged photos, it is difficult, often impossible, to erase or withdraw it.

While these ideas represent one form of surveillance, more explicit forms are facilitated by new media technology. The state, for example, may monitor its citizens to identify which websites they visit, who they email or who they talk to using voice over internet protocols (VoIP) such as Skype. Digital transmissions are relatively easy to intercept and read, especially if they are unencrypted. Surveillance targets, from environmental activists to political parties, may not realise that they are being monitored. Monitoring 'from above' (surveillance) is an issue, therefore. However, so is monitoring 'from

below' (sousveillance) – a situation arising from the ability of smartphone and tablet technology to record and publish people's everyday behaviour.

A greater willingness and ability to share information online also leaves people open to forms of surveillance such as digital stalking and bullying. Neelamalar and Chitra's (2009) study of Indian college students and their use of social networks like Facebook does, however, suggest an 'awareness of the danger and risk involved in using these sites'. They interpret this as 'a positive indicator Indian youth are not only techno-savvy and socially active through social networking sites but they also possess social consciousness'.

### TEST YOURSELF

Suggest one issue raised by new media that does not apply to old media.

### Implications

The development of new media has led to a general debate about the impact that changing technologies have on economic, political and cultural life. This debate revolves around two opposing views: digital optimism and pessimism.

#### Digital optimism

From this viewpoint, the defining characteristic of new media is a form of *digital liberation* that Negroponte (1995) claims is based on four processes:

- decentralisation
- globalisation
- harmonisation
- empowerment.

These processes impact on society in a range of ways.

In economic terms, we see the development of new models of production, distribution and exchange, particularly 'free' or 'gifting' models, where the consumer pays nothing to use a medium. One significant new model is the development of open economic systems where software, for example, is developed collaboratively to take advantage of wide creative pools of talent. Tapscott and Williams (2008) call this 'Wikinomics', in acknowledgement of the pioneering collaborative efforts of Wikipedia.

Producers – especially large corporations – have to be more responsive to consumer demands because the ability to act as a global crowd, passing information swiftly from individual to individual, means corporate behaviour

is continually being monitored, evaluated and held to account. Surowiecki (2005) argues that digital technology assists crowd-sourcing. This process is based on 'the wisdom of crowds': if you ask enough people their opinion, a basic 'crowd truth' will emerge.

Politically, the global flow of information weakens the state's hold over individuals and ideas. Repressive state actions are much harder to disguise or keep secret when populations have access to instant forms of mass communication, such as Twitter. The internet also makes it harder for the state to censor or restrict the flow of information. This contributes to **political socialisation** because people have a greater understanding of the meaning of issues and events.



### KEY TERM

**Political socialisation:** the various social processes involved in the teaching and learning of political ideas and practices.

Culturally, behaviour can be both participatory *and* personalised. The global village combines collectivity with individuality; co-operation flourishes while people simultaneously maintain what Negroponte calls the 'Daily Me' – the personalisation of things like news and information focused on the specific interests of each individual. Personalisation contributes to participation by encouraging a diverse individuality that leads to the development of new ways of thinking and behaving. The fact that people can be anonymous on the web encourages both freedom of speech and whistle-blowing.

#### Digital pessimism

An alternative interpretation argues that the globalising processes on which new media depends are neither wholly beneficial nor unambiguous. While globalisation involves decentralising processes, for example, it also produces greater centralisation across economic, political and cultural behaviours.

In economic terms, 'free' business models are only free in the sense that their costs are hidden from the consumer. These costs include the following:

- Exploiting free labour – the news and opinion site *The Huffington Post*, for example, was built around the free labour provided by its blogging contributors; the site was sold by its owners for \$300 million in 2011.

- Driving down quality – companies that cannot rely on cheap or free labour must either cut their costs, thereby potentially undermining quality, or go out of business.
- Privacy – new media that depends on free labour, such as social networking sites where consumers create content, make money by selling user data to advertisers.
- Copyright – some corporate social media sites lay claim to the copyright of user-generated content, such as photographs and videos, that can then be sold to advertisers.

New media ownership is sometimes likened to what Socha and Eber-Schmid call ‘the growing pains of the American Wild West’, where a diversity of companies compete for market share. However, the situation may really be similar to that of old media, where large corporations exert considerable control over the choices made by consumers. For example, owners of internet search engines, switching to other service providers.

A further similarity between the behaviour of old and new media corporations involves two related processes:

- locking out competitors from markets
- locking in consumers to products.

An example of both is Amazon’s development of an eBook reader (the Kindle) that gave the company control over who could publish eBooks for this product and how consumers could use the product (to buy eBooks from Amazon).

Conglomeration is a related process that mirrors the behaviour of old-media corporations. The highly concentrated ownership of new media allows global corporations to buy up competitors or emerging technologies. Schecter (2000) claims that this leads to a decrease in digital diversity in areas such as news production. As he argues: ‘The internet is not very diverse, even though it appears to be. The concentration in ownership that is restructuring old media has led to conglomeration in news transmission and a narrowing of sourcing in new media. It is cheaper for Web sites to buy someone else’s news than generate their own.’ It is also ‘cheaper’ for global corporations to take and republish content generated by individual users with little or no prospect of recompense.

Politically, mass communication tools can be used by repressive regimes to restrict individual freedoms and enhance various forms of state surveillance. For example, GPS technology be used to track both the online and offline behaviour of users. The ‘wisdom of crowds’ equation can be applied to the development of a ‘hive

mind’, where individual dissent is not tolerated. In addition, the ‘stupidity of crowds’ is emphasised in terms of their being more prone to moral panics based on ‘mob rule’.

### ACTIVITY

*Create a poster to demonstrate either digital optimism or digital pessimism. Present your poster to the class, debating the pros and cons of these two views.*

## Media representation and effects

### The role of the media in the representation of social groups and ideas, with particular reference to class, gender, ethnicity and age

#### Modernism

A modernist context for understanding **media representation** is based on the belief that objects and ideas have an essential reality that can be identified and compared to representations of ‘the real thing’. For example, there is a Taj Mahal in Uttar Pradesh, India and a Taj Mahal in Atlantic City, USA. The former is a religious shrine while the latter is a hotel. Despite being designed to mimic the architecture of the real Taj Mahal, the building in Atlantic City is clearly just a representation of the original that would not be mistaken for the real thing. Applying this logic to the media, something can be represented in one of two ways:

- accurately, by describing it as ‘it really is’, such as in a photograph
- inaccurately, through deliberate or accidental *misrepresentation*.



#### KEY TERM

**Media representation:** the various ways the media portray ideas, individuals and groups.

When examining modernist notions of media representations, it is important to assess the extent to which categories like class, age, gender and ethnicity are accurately or inaccurately represented.

## Class

Media representations of social class take a range of forms, with different classes stereotypically represented in different ways. The working class, for example, is routinely represented through a relatively narrow and limited range of identities:

- historical, such as popular costume dramas that focus on servitude, poverty and criminality
- contemporary, where a similar range of themes recur, with working-class life represented through socially problematic behaviours such as crime, welfare dependency, unemployment, violence and sexual promiscuity.

Recurrent themes, from news reports, through documentaries to entertainment shows, represent the working classes as:

- dangerous – people to be feared because of their unpredictability
- problematic in terms of their involvement in illegal/immoral behaviours
- dependent on both the state and the tolerance and generosity of the middle and upper classes.

Representations rarely portray the *ordinariness* of working-class life, preferring instead to focus on a narrow range of situations that are occasionally positive, such as professional sport, but more usually negative.

Middle-class representation is generally broader, ranging across professional employment and cultural associations such as music, fashion and art. Such representations help to link class associations with culture. Lower-class **popular culture** is represented as:

- manufactured
- artificial
- superficial
- disposable
- undemanding and culturally valueless.



### KEY TERM

**Mass/popular culture:** the ‘culture of the masses’, as opposed to the high culture of a ruling elite, characterised as simple, worthless, mass-produced and disposable.

Middle- and upper-class cultural life is represented as a high cultural reflection and opposition of low culture:

- difficult
- demanding

- deep
- long-lasting
- culturally valuable.

A related dimension here is the marginalisation of working-class life. The Glasgow Media Group’s study of television reporting of industrial disputes, for example, argued that the working classes had less direct access to the media and less control over how they were portrayed. If they were represented at all, it was usually in a negative way. Marginalisation can also be seen in the way that dramas and documentaries largely ignore or erase working-class life and contributions to historical movements. Instead, these programmes tend to focus on the actions of upper-class historical figures. For example, British history is largely represented in film, television, newspapers and books through the thoughts and actions of royalty and the aristocracy.

Contemporary forms of invisibility exclude working-class life through a focus on the interests, actions and activities of business leaders, middle- and upper-class politicians and philanthropists. Where the working classes feature in accounts of social and economic development, they are more likely to be cast as beneficiaries of middle-class help and advice or as subjects for discussion by middle-class ‘experts’ about working-class vices. In contrast, middle-class identities are often represented by virtues such as resourcefulness, productivity, cultivation and helpfulness. These virtues are displayed in relation to the ‘less fortunate’, from teaching them how to discipline children to how to find work. Members of the working class are represented as subjects of middle-class power and control. They are portrayed as dysfunctional, dependent and socially problematic, while the middle class is purposeful, independent and socially supportive.

**Aggregations: Stereotypes**, or one-sided representations, of working-class life are aggregated – they are applied to the class as a whole. Ehrenreich, for example, argues that, for the media, to be ‘working class’ means being:

- inarticulate
- old-fashioned
- uneducated
- lazy
- incapable.



### KEY TERM

**Stereotype:** the practice of assigning particular, one-sided, partial, characteristics to whole groups, regardless of their individual differences.

She suggests that these representations silence working-class voices, making them both literally and metaphorically dumb.

Higher-class aggregations are more positive, highlighting their virtues as a class. Problematic behaviour – greed, selfishness or criminality – is represented as indicative of individual human weaknesses rather than symbolic of a whole class. The 2008 global financial crisis, for example, is generally represented in terms of the actions of a few ‘rogue bankers’ rather than indicating fundamental and wide-reaching social problems caused by middle- and upper-class behaviour.

### TEST YOURSELF

Suggest two ways in which working- and middle-class media representations differ.

### Age

**Youth:** Ownership and control of national and global media is often characterised as middle-aged, middle-class, and male. This idea of power and control suggests that representations of young people are largely constructed through an ‘adult gaze’. How this power is used, however, varies across time and space. Contemporary societies, in particular, demonstrate high levels of ambivalence about childhood and youth:

- On one level, children are represented in terms of their innocent and uncorrupted nature.
- On another, they are represented as unruly, lacking self-control and requiring adult discipline and guidance.

Both forms often feature in relation to youth and new technologies, including cinema, television and computers. In relation to the internet, for example, children’s perceived innocence combined with (adult) technological fears results in children being seen as victims of their own lack of control and discipline, through exposure to a variety of ideas and experiences that they are not equipped to deal with. This can lead to **moral panics**. As Pearson (1983) demonstrates, moral panics about the behaviour of young people and technology have been a persistent feature of media representations over the past century, involving traits like:

- rebellion
- disrespect

- selfishness
- obsessions with self and sex.



### KEY TERM

**Moral panics:** heightened sense of fear of behaviour seen as a threat or challenge to the moral order in society. ‘Terrorism’, for example, may be considered a contemporary form of moral panic in Western societies.

Aggregate or collective representations frequently represent male youth as delinquent and politically apathetic. Representations are also mixed, which reflects both changing social *mores* and youth as a fragmented category, with clear divisions across categories such as class and gender. Representations of young working-class males tend to be very different from those of young middle-class females.

A particularly dominant form of representation over the past 40 years has been the distinction between normal and abnormal youth. Normal youth are defined in opposition to various spectacular youth sub-cultures such as Mods and Rockers, Skinheads, Hippies and Punks, which enjoyed a short time in the media spotlight. Contemporary representations also focus on celebrations of youth. These might take the form of rebellion from adult rules and responsibilities, vibrant social change, or adults’ perception of youth as a highly desirable physical state.



How is youth represented positively and negatively in the media?

**Old age:** As with youth, the elderly have traditionally been represented in a narrow range of roles, with a particular emphasis on social problems. Their problematic status has recently been constructed around how the

burden of an ageing population affects the rest of society through the increasing costs of state pensions, hospital treatment and social care. Individually and collectively, their representation is also largely unsympathetic, based on images of:

- senility
- illness, both mental and physical
- unattractiveness.

Willis (1999), for example, notes how representations of older people are 'often crudely stereotyped in television drama', with fictional portrayals showing them as grumpy, interfering, lonely, stubborn, not interested in sex, silly (especially older women) and miserable.

A reverse form of gendered stereotyping also occurs when elderly men are used to add a sense of seriousness/moral gravity, particularly in news coverage.

Although these images can still be seen in some parts of the media, in others, the changing nature of representation is reflected in more sympathetic portrayals that reflect the changing nature of media audiences. Willis notes that the elderly watch more television than other social groups and they increasingly demand programming that reflects their interests. Their lack of representation in areas like popular drama and film has also changed in response to wider social changes.

Changing representations of older women are particularly apparent. This group, traditionally portrayed as objects of pity, charity, social work and the medical profession, are increasingly represented as fashionable, active and *sexual* beings. While numbers alone do not guarantee positive representations, two further reasons make this more common:

- The elderly are an increasingly affluent population segment; the Institute for Fiscal Studies (2006) estimated that around 80% of wealth in the UK is held by those aged 50+ and the 'global grey pound' is attractive to the advertisers who fund large areas of the media.
- Television as an important mass medium is a relatively new phenomenon and, as the people who own, control and work in it grow older, their interests are reflected in new and different representations of the elderly.

### TEST YOURSELF

Briefly explain what is meant by the 'adult gaze' and how it relates to representations of youth.

### Gender

Gender stereotypes relating to masculinity and femininity generally focus on two areas: physical and emotional. While traditional representations tend to reinforce clear gender differences, contemporary representations occasionally display a greater gender convergence.

Physical representations of bodies were traditionally focused on women, but they are increasingly relevant to men. These representations are important in two ways:

- how they have changed – the greater frequency with which *male bodies* are represented, especially by advertisers, as sexually desirable for women and culturally desirable for men
- the way in which they have *not* changed: female bodies are still used to sell everything from cars to camping equipment, and men are still allowed a greater range of acceptable body shapes.

Body representation forms part of a wider set of ideas about beauty, attractiveness and how women in particular should look and behave. This is particularly relevant in unstated assumptions that female beauty is both heterosexual and largely for the benefit of what Mulvey (1975) calls 'the male gaze'. This reflects the idea that female lives are viewed, sometimes literally, through a masculine lens and controlled by male needs and desires. The male media gaze defines feminine identities in ways that are attractive to men. Where the media shapes social perceptions of femininity, it follows that there are important consequences if women are unable or unwilling to match these perceptions. One aspect of media-defined femininity that encapsulates age inequality is the association between attractiveness, desire and youth. Young women are portrayed as 'objects of desire', but elderly women are not.

Ferguson (1983) studied the influence of women's magazines on perceptions of femininity. She suggests that women's magazines socialise women into a 'cult of femininity' by focusing on such topics as beautification, child-rearing, housework and cooking. McRobbie (1981) carried out a similar study of magazines aimed at teenage girls. She found that these magazines rely on a formula of written stories, photo-stories and problem pages. The central message is that girls should focus on capturing and thinking about boys. The male is portrayed as dominant while the female is passive, adapting to the interests and needs of the male.

Grant et al. (2006) suggest that women face 'a double jeopardy of age and gender discrimination' that has a different impact on women of different

ages. Younger women, for example, face a range of pressures – how to look, dress and behave, to conform to media notions of femininity. Older women must confront the problem that if women are defined by their sexuality, attractiveness and desirability, they suffer from a diminished identity once they lose these characteristics.



In the Western world, alcohol adverts are often tied to what are perceived as specific gendered activities.

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Media representations often reflect broader assumptions about male and female behaviour. For example, women should be co-operative and submissive, and dominant females are often represented as figures of fun or (deviant) sexuality. Macdonald (2003) notes a particular category of female ('ladettes') that challenges these stereotypes and breaks down gender barriers. It does so through representations emphasising women's ability to behave in the same way as men. This suggests that gender representations are 'not static and woman are permitted to take on certain masculine behaviours in certain situations'. 'Abnormal representations' may, however, simply prove the general rule. Female sexuality, for example, is routinely used to sell consumer goods, employing an exaggerated form of (hetero)sexuality that combines the physical, such as thinness, and the emotional, such as patriarchal notions of 'availability'.

Gauntlett (2002) argues that there are increasingly positive aspects to media representations. He suggests, for example, that the media is 'within limits, a force for change'; traditional stereotypical representations of women have been replaced by 'feisty, successful "girl power" icons', while male representations have changed, from 'ideals of absolute toughness, stubborn self-reliance and emotional silence' to a greater emphasis on

emotions, the need for help and advice and 'the problems of masculinity'.

### Ethnicity

One feature of ethnic representation in the Western media is the gradual disappearance of crude stereotypes and demeaning representations of 'black people'. While overt racism is no longer tolerated, Hall (1995) argues that it has been replaced by inferential racism – black ethnicities are represented in ways that stress their *cultural*, rather than *biological*, difference. Part of this representation involves their 'problematic nature': minority ethnicities are represented as the source, rather than victims, of social problems. This, in turn, reflects two forms of representation:

- 1 Over-representation, according to Klimkiewicz (1999), in areas such as news and fiction as perpetrators and victims; UK news reporting of Africa, for example, represents black ethnicities as:
  - victims of 'natural disasters' such as floods and famines
  - perpetrators of man-made disasters involving wars and corruption.
  - In this context, ethnic minorities are mainly viewed through a white, middle-class and male gaze. In news reporting, this frequently represents whites as saviours, through things like government and public aid/charity.
- 2 Under-representation in areas such as advertising and drama. Sweney (2011) reports that 'Actors from black, Asian or other ethnic minorities appeared in just 5% of UK TV ads'. Sreberny (1999) argues that contemporary television representations involve 'two-dimensional characters, often negatively stereotyped'. Morris (2000) illustrates this through the experiences of Roma minorities – criticised for *not* fitting the stereotype of the 'true' Gypsy while simultaneously represented as 'dirty, thieving, parasitic and living outside the law'.

**The white gaze:** Carrington (2002) claims that the white gaze extends to apparently positive black images constructed around cultural spaces such as sport, fashion and music. He calls these representations of hyper-blackness which promote stereotypes of black bodies solely in terms of 'athleticism and animalism' (the idea these features of black excellence are 'natural').

A further aspect of the white gaze is the representation of ethnic minorities in terms of their 'Otherness' – how 'They' are different from 'Us'. This is usually constructed in

terms of cultural difference as the cause of social problems. Gilroy (1990) refers to this as a new racism that focuses on cultural differences. Where scientifically discredited notions of race focused on biological differences such as skin colour, new racism is based on differences in language, religion and family life. 'Otherness' is also represented by threat:

- cultural threats that challenge a dominant, white, way of life through practices such as arranged and forced marriages or the notion of sharia law, a legal system based on Islamic religious principles
- physical threats in terms of terrorism and criminality. Hall et al. (1978), for example, note moral panics about 'black muggers' in the 1970s and, more recently, the claim by the Metropolitan Police (2002) that mugging in London is 'predominantly a black crime'.

### TEST YOURSELF

Briefly explain the term 'hyper-reality'.

### Postmodernism

Modernist approaches consider representations in terms of how and why they *misrepresent* particular groups. However, Baudrillard (1995) argues that representations cannot be assessed in terms of whether class or gender is accurately or inaccurately represented because how something is represented *is* its reality.

Modernist approaches suggest that the media represents something like 'ethnicity' in ways that distort its reality – 'the real' is compared to its media representation in order to distinguish it from the 'not real'. Baudrillard suggests that this approach is mistaken on two levels:

- 1 It assumes that things in the social world have a reality beyond how they are represented. In the physical world, for example, we can look at the original, authentic, Taj Mahal and compare it with the various ways it has been represented through inauthentic copies, such as the Taj Mahal hotel. Concepts such as class or ethnicity, however, have no 'authentic' reality because they are social constructs, the product of how they are initially described and represented. All the media does, therefore, is construct *representations of representations*.
- 2 'Reality' is experienced differently depending on who you are, where you are and your source of information.

Every audience constructs its own version of reality, and everything represented in the media is experienced as multiple realities, all of which – and none of which – are *authentically real*. Everything is simply a representation of something seen from different viewpoints. The reality of anything – class, age, gender, ethnicity – cannot be found in any single definitive account or experience.

### Hyper-reality

Baudrillard uses the term **hyper-reality** to express how different narrative accounts interweave and conflict in a constantly changing pattern of representations built on representations. Eventually they form a 'reality' in themselves – something that is 'more real' than the reality it purports to describe. For example, if we change how a concept such as age is represented, we change its reality.



### KEY TERM

**Hyper-reality:** postmodern concept that argues that the media creates realities that are 'more real' than the ones they purport to represent. Our 'knowledge' of the American Wild West, for example, is filtered through the lens of Hollywood film, just as our knowledge of Africa may be filtered through media images of famine, war, corruption and poverty.

Each reality is constructed from the way in which individuals pick and choose different ideas to suit their own prejudices or beliefs. Baudrillard calls this process *simulacra* ('representations that refer to other representations') – simulations that are the reality they depict. To talk about media representations as distortions of a hidden or obscured 'reality' ('*deep structures*') misses the point. The media does not simply 'mediate the message' through representations; as McLuhan and Powers (1992) argue, 'they *are* the message'.

This idea is important in relation to the social construction of media content, because this content involves a representation of reality that Fiske calls the 'transparency fallacy'. This is a rejection of the idea that reporting of something like ethnicity offers a neutral 'window on the world' that describes an objective reality. The world represented through the media is always and inevitably a reconstructed reality. It is filtered through a media lens that is no more and no less objective than any other reality filter.



How is Disneyland an example of hyper-reality?

### Power

Modernism considers power in the context of how institutions such as the media use it to impose representations of class, gender, age and ethnicity on the powerless. Postmodernists argue that power over the production and distribution of information is no longer concentrated within institutions, but within social networks. Essentially, this means that information is produced and consumed by the same people. Information flows between different points (nodes) within a network in such a way as to make it impossible to distinguish between producer and consumer. This idea challenges modernist notions of power that centre on class (Marxist) and gender (feminist), and which claim that misrepresentations flow from this centred control of information.

In postmodernity, there are many centres of information, each of which disseminates different representations. There are no dominant forms of representation because there are no dominant forms of media any more. What we have, in a media-saturated society built on information structures and networks, is a series of shifting representations of these categories. They are no more and no less real than whatever they represent.

### ACTIVITY

*Using a selection of newspapers, identify how they use stereotyped pictures and language to represent different classes, ages, genders or ethnicities.*

### Social patterns in listening, viewing and reading

How people use the media – listening, viewing and reading – is related to two particular social contexts:

- The nature of social development, considered in terms of what Baran and Davis (2011) call the strong association between media use and ‘social and demographic variables like age, sex, social status and education’.
- Levels of technological development, considered in terms of the range and type of media and content available for consumption within any given population.

The relationship between these two forms of development is significant. In the past, the take-up of media, such as television, was closely related to factors such as income and social status. Television receivers were expensive and the new medium represented a form of conspicuous consumption that suggested a higher level of social status. Current technological take-up, in the shape of computers, smartphones and broadband internet access, is still linked to class, in that these can be expensive technologies so individuals must have a certain level of income to afford them. However, an arguably more significant development is the relationship between media use and age. Newer technologies, for example, have a much lower age profile than older technologies. OfCom (2008) found that ‘under-45s tend to be more engaged with digital media’. Over the past century, there has been a change from vertical population splits based on class; to horizontal splits based on age, gender and ethnicity.

### TEST YOURSELF

Make a list of ways in which differences in technological development between societies help explain differences in their patterns of media use.

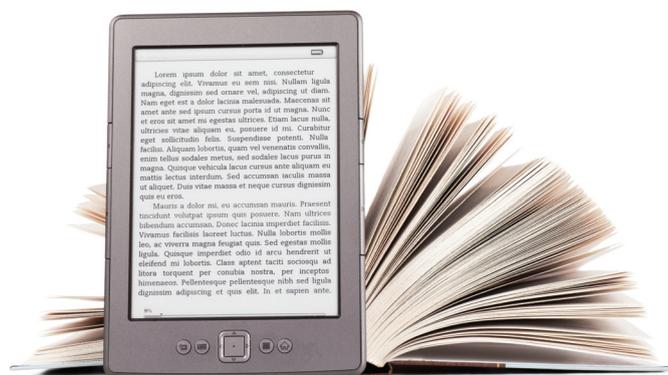
### Digital convergence

In basic terms, activities such as listening, viewing and reading remain separate – people listen to music, watch television and read newspapers using different media. However, new technologies have forged a convergence between these activities because they allow different types of media to be consumed on the same device and at the same time.

Access measures	Indian	Pakistani	Black Caribbean	Black African	UK total
Multiple platform (TV, internet and mobile)	62	65	55	62	53
Digital TV ownership	83	89	81	82	82
Mobile phone	90	91	88	95	85
Internet use	76	72	64	69	62
Willingness to get internet	25	35	30	30	15

Table 8.3 UK adult media use by ethnic group.

Source: OfCom (2008)



Are patterns of listening, viewing and reading converging with new media?

### Listening

Despite being one of the oldest forms of media, audio (radio, hi-fi and new technologies such as MP3 players) remains popular all over the world (Table 8.4). While China ranks lowest for radio/hi-fi listening, it ranks highest for MP3 usage, which suggests that emerging nations may embrace newer technologies and bypass the older ones. The age profile for radio listening in the UK is skewed towards older listeners; those over 55, for example, listen to almost twice as much radio as those aged 15–24.

	Radio	Hi-Fi	MP3 player
Germany	76	22	32
USA	74	21	33
UK	69	30	36
China	44	18	49

Table 8.4 Percentage of adults who regularly consume audio.

Source: OfCom (2012)

A further point to note is the rise of online radio listening and the development of streaming radio

services such as Spotify (with both free and premium services). Spotify currently averages around 2 million listeners per month, with a range of competitor services averaging between 0.25 and 1 million listeners.

If we consider the global market for something like radio, OfCom (2007) notes that among the BRIC nations (the emerging markets of Brazil, Russia, India and China) ‘where access to television is not ubiquitous, the role of radio in society can be more akin to that of television in the West’. In India, for example, ‘radio listening is growing rapidly and now enjoys a weekly reach of around 27%, a figure comparable to newspaper readership’. The most popular FM radio station in India, Akashvani, has around 68 million listeners per week, despite only being available to around 30% of the population.

### Reading

In many countries there has been a significant long-term decline in the percentage of the adult population reading a daily newspaper. More specifically, there has been a decline across all sections of the newspaper market. One feature of this particular market is its horizontal splits, with marked readership divisions occurring in relation to:

- **Age:** The long-term age profile of newspaper readership in the UK is rising, with some, such as the *Telegraph*, having around 75% of their readership in the 50+ age group. A similar pattern emerges in US readership, with a gradually ageing newspaper profile.
- **Gender:** Slightly more men than women read a daily newspaper, although this hides a wide range of readership differences across different newspapers.
- **Ethnicity:** Newspaper readership in India, for example, is divided by language. The most popular newspaper, *Dainik Jagran*, has around 17 million readers and publishes in Hindi, *Malayala Manorama* (around 10 million readers) publishes in Malayalam, while the *Times of India* is the most popular English-language

newspaper (around 5 million readers). One complicating factor to note here is geographic location; accessibility to newspapers, radio and television is directly proportional to regional geography. In mountainous regions, for example, there is greater exposure to television and radio, and less to print media.

In terms of vertical cleavage, readership patterns broadly reflect three 'cultural divisions of taste' identified by Lynes (1949):

- Highbrow refers to 'superior and refined' tastes and represents the highest cultural forms to which a society should aspire.
- Middlebrow refers to the mediocre that aspires to be highbrow but which lacks originality, subtlety or depth.
- Lowbrow involves the brutal and worthless aspects of a culture that lack any pretence at sophistication, insight or refinement – cultural forms that are characteristic of 'the masses'.

While these categories were intended to be *satirical*, they fit quite well with class patterns in newspaper content and readership. Those at the lower end of the market attract far more working-class readers than those in the middle and top.

OfCom (2012a) notes that 'the general trend is falling engagement with print formats' as a whole, accompanied by a substantial increase in online newspapers. The *Mail*, for example, is the most visited newspaper site in the world, with around 50 million visitors each month. The next most visited are, in order, the *Chinese People's Daily*, the UK *Guardian* and the US *New York Times*.

Newspapers across the globe are also migrating from print to digital formats, through smartphone and tablet-based apps. This has resulted in a wider readership and people spending more time reading. As OfCom (2012) suggests, 'the platforms are not necessarily substitutional, and indeed might be considered complementary'.

### TEST YOURSELF

Suggest reasons for 'falling engagement with print media'.

### Viewing

Television was and remains a hugely popular leisure activity in modern industrialised countries, with around

85% of adults watching in their free time. It is an equally popular medium for all age groups, although the elderly are the highest consumers. This is probably because a higher proportion of this age group are housebound, but it may also be because alternative forms of leisure are increasingly aimed at a younger, generally more affluent, audience.

More recently, the development of digital television has expanded the range and scope of services to include many more channels, high-definition channels, video-on-demand services, such as sporting events and films, and digital video recording.

Globally, this has resulted in both a changing television audience, drawing a greater proportion of younger viewers, and different levels of access to digital television:

- UK: 90%
- USA: 80%
- India: 25%
- China: 25%

This situation is likely to change in the near future, however. India, for example, is due to enact a digital changeover from analogue services in 2016.

While television remains a significant source of news for global populations, patterns of viewing differ markedly between developed and developing nations. Average daily consumption figures include:

- USA: 280 minutes
- UK: 225 minutes
- India: 138 minutes
- China: 158 minutes.

One significant change in television use in countries such as the UK and the USA, where the technology is well established, is the fragmentation of audiences. Apart from a small number of 'communal events', such as the football World Cup, families are less likely to watch television together. This is partly explained by the much lower cost of television sets, which means that many households now have more than one. However, it is also a result of greater programming diversity introduced by digital technologies.

This change in viewing, away from the communal and onto the individual, is reflected in niche programming introduced by the increased number of digital channels. Programmes targeting specific interests are now much more widely available. Bjur (2009) argues: 'In 1999 social viewing, watching together, accounted for

45%, and in 2008 it was down to 37%. We are becoming more and more individualistic in our TV choices. We can no longer speak of TV as a social adhesive, a unifying force’.

### ACTIVITY

*Over the course of seven days, keep a diary that lists your viewing, listening and reading and the medium you use for each. How might your pattern of media use be different from the same diary kept by someone of your age 50 years ago?*

## Different theories of the effects and uses of the media; hypodermic syringe; uses and gratification; cultural effects studies

In previous sections we have looked at how media content is selected and presented, and considered the role of the media in the representation of social groups. In addition to these factors, it is important to understand the ways in which audiences are affected by the media. If the media has no effect on people’s ideas and behaviour, then how content is selected and presented is of little significance. In this section, therefore, we can examine a range of ‘**media effects**’ theories, based on categories of direct, indirect and limited effects.



### KEY TERM

**Media effects:** the various ways in which the media affects or influences people.

### Direct effects

Models that argue that the media has a direct and tangible effect (usually a negative one) on behaviour are sometimes called media-centric. Older forms of this model suggest a relatively simple, direct and effective relationship between media and the audience.

### Hypodermic

**Hypodermic syringe** or *magic bullet* models argue that media messages are like a drug injected into the audience’s mind. This implies that messages are transmitted and received by an audience in ways that change or reinforce their ideas and behaviour. Media messages, therefore,

determine how audiences see and understand the world in a directly measurable causal fashion:



### KEY TERM

**Hypodermic syringe:** media-effects theory that argues that media messages are like a drug injected directly into the audience’s mind in ways that change their behaviour.

The media (cause) transmits information and the audience reacts (effect) in a broadly predictable way that can be directly attributed to the message received. Audiences, therefore, are seen as passive receivers rather than active interpreters of media messages. This is based on the concept of mass society. Where people are socially isolated, they have few strong links to social networks, such as family, friends, work colleagues or wider communities, that can provide alternative sources of information and interpretation. Audiences are receptive to whatever the media transmits because their social isolation means they depend on it for information.

Cumulation theory is a variation of this basic idea that suggests that media effects are cumulative, rather than immediate. Prolonged exposure to violent films or games can result in both changed behaviour and desensitisation. The more someone is exposed to media violence, for example, the less likely they are to be moved, shocked or appalled by real violence.



How are media messages directly injected into an audience?

## Transmission

Transmission models developed by Shannon and Weaver (1949) suggest that the transmission process is split into two parts:

- the information source (such as a government announcement)
- the transmission source (such as a newspaper or television report of the announcement).

Media messages can have different sources: *direct* reporting might involve a newspaper printing a speech made by a government minister, while *indirect* reporting involves the speech being selectively quoted to support a particular story. The source of the message, in other words, will significantly affect how it is received. It is also possible for audiences to be indirectly affected by a media message through their interaction with people who are directly affected. These are people who pass on media messages through conversation with those who have not personally experienced them. This introduces concepts of noise and interference – anything that distracts from or interferes with the transmission of a message. The media can introduce noise through selective reporting, while audiences may receive the same message in different ways, both directly and indirectly. Transmission models are a more sophisticated explanation of media effects than their hypodermic counterparts because, although they suggest direct effects, these are mediated and modified through different channels and sources. This makes it more difficult to measure the exact effect of the media.

Gauntlett (1998), however, suggests that all transmission models have a basic flaw: they see audiences as uncritical individuals, easily influenced by whatever they read, see or hear. Gauntlett also suggests that the empirical evidence for direct media effects is weak, partly because most research takes place under artificial conditions, such as a laboratory. These do not adequately represent the real situations and contexts in which people use the media (an ecological fallacy):

- Bandura et al.'s (1961) 'Bobo doll' experiment is frequently cited as evidence that watching televised violence produces violence in children. One of the weaknesses of the study was that the children were 'rated for violence' by adult assessors, which raises questions about the objectivity of the research.

- Belson (1978) also claims that prolonged exposure to media violence produces violent behaviour in young males. Hagell and Newburn (1994), however, found a general lack of interest in television among young offenders.

The focus of direct-effects models has also changed in recent times. It has moved away from general audiences and towards the idea of *vulnerable audiences*, children in particular. The argument here is that their lack of social experience and tendency to copy behaviour makes children more susceptible to direct media effects (and copy-cat violence in particular) than adults. Evidence for direct effects tends to be *anecdotal* – the media claims, rather than proves, a relationship between, for example, violent behaviour and violent play. Gauntlett (1995) demonstrates how even very young children may be media literate – they have an understanding about the media and how it works. For example, most children can distinguish between fictional and factual representations of violence.

### TEST YOURSELF

Suggest one way in which the media might directly affect people's behaviour.

## Indirect effects

**Cultural-effects models** suggest that while effects are strong in the long term, they are slow, cumulative and operate through the media's ability to become part of an audience's cultural background. The more the media plays a valued role in everyday interaction, the greater the consumption, and the stronger the long-term influence.

### KEY TERM

**Cultural-effects model:** neo-Marxist theory that argues that although media effects are strong in the long term, they are slow, cumulative and operate through the ability to become part of an audience's cultural background.

These models see the media as a cultural (or ideological) institution whose primary role is to promote and police cultural values. The media is an agent of social control the ideas that it propagates decisively influence people's behaviour. Newbold (1995), for example, argues that the media acts at the institutional (large group) level of society, not at the level of individual beliefs. It exercises social

control through its actions as a socialising agency, advising and guiding audiences and, by so doing, exercising a hegemonic role.

**Cultivation:** Cultivation theory suggests that television, in particular, cultivates distinctive attitudes and orientations in its audience over time, rather than directly determining behaviour. People who watch a lot of television gradually take on board the beliefs and attitudes to which they are exposed. If crime is constantly portrayed on television, people become fearful of crime in ways that are out of all proportion to their risk of becoming a victim to it. For Chandler (1995), the media ‘induces a general mindset’ around particular areas of social life, such as crime, taking on a hegemonic role where some beliefs are encouraged and others discouraged. Attitudes and behaviour do not change overnight, however. Media effects are gradual, long term and built up through a range of techniques:

- the consistent promotion of particular ideas
- the marginalisation of dissenting views
- the repetition of ideas until they taken for granted (to the point that, for example, ‘everyone knows’ crime is increasing).

According to this perspective, the media leads people towards particular ideas and ways of thinking. As Gerbner et al. (1986) suggest: ‘The continual repetition of patterns (myths, ideologies, “facts”, relationships, etc.) serve to define the world and legitimize the social order.’ **Audience reception** theory is an example of this type of model. It is based on the idea that media messages always have a range of possible meanings and interpretations. Some of these are intended by the sender (a newspaper owner or an author, for example) and others are read into the message by the audience. As Hall (1980) argues, even simple media texts, such as an advert, involve:

- encoding – the ideas the author wants an audience to grasp
- decoding – how an audience interprets or decodes the message, depending on factors such as their social background or the context in which the message is received.



#### KEY TERM

**Audience reception:** media-effects theory based on the idea that media messages always have a range of possible meanings and interpretations, some intended by the sender and others read into the message by the audience.

A receiving audience always has some choice about whether to accept or reject a message. Their receptiveness, however, depends on a range of personal and social factors. Hall suggests three main ways a media message is read by an audience: **hegemonic codes**, **negotiated codes** and **oppositional codes**.

- **Hegemonic codes:** the audience shares the assumptions and interpretations of the author and reads the message in the way it was intended.
- **Negotiated codes:** although the audience broadly shares the author’s views, they modify their interpretation in the light of their own particular feelings, beliefs or attitudes.
- **Oppositional codes:** The audience is antagonistic towards the author and therefore rejects the message.



#### KEY TERMS

**Hegemonic codes:** the audience shares the assumptions and interpretations of the author and read the message in the way it is intended.

**Negotiated codes:** although an audience broadly shares the author’s views, they modify their interpretation in the light of their own particular feelings, beliefs or attitudes.

**Oppositional codes:** an audience is antagonistic towards the author and therefore rejects or attempts to challenge the message.

**Professional codes:** the values used by editors and journalists to guide their assessment of media content and presentation.

(**Professional codes** of presentation also package the message in a recognisably professional format.) This basic set of responses is, however, complicated by three further media processes:

- 1 Agenda setting: McCombs and Shaw (1972) argue that the media identifies and selects the ideas people are encouraged to think about. It has the power to put certain issues ‘up for discussion’ while attempting to close down issues they do not want discussed.
- 2 Framing involves presenting ideas to audiences in ways that suggest how they *should* be interpreted. Audiences are primed to understand issues and ideas in terms of what Simon and Xenos (2000) call ‘elite discourses’: how media owners and controllers want their audiences to understand an issue. This may involve, for example, highlighting certain opinions while marginalising or ignoring others.

- 3 Myth making: Gerbner (1994) argues that the media has grown so powerful and pervasive in global societies that it creates *mythical realities* for audiences who immerse themselves in media content. The heavier an individual's media consumption, from watching television, reading newspapers, surfing the web or social networking, the more likely they are to be drawn into a 'fantasy world' of the media's creation, such as believing crime and violence are more prevalent than they actually are.

### TEST YOURSELF

Suggest one way the media might indirectly affect people's behaviour.

**Limited effects:** Audio-centric or diffusion approaches focus on how audiences *use* the media to satisfy particular needs. These approaches suggest that the media has few, if any, measurable effects, an idea neatly summarised by Berelson et al.'s (1948) observation that 'some kinds of communication on some kinds of issues brought to the attention of some kinds of people under some kinds of conditions have some kinds of effects.' Diffusion theories focus on how media messages spread across an audience through a trickle-down effect. Although messages originate with media producers, they are received by an audience in two ways:

- directly, such as personally viewing a news broadcast
- indirectly, through interaction with those who directly received the message, other media sources reporting the original message and so forth.

In other words, an original message is continually relayed throughout an audience and, at each stage of the retelling, the message may be subtly changed or reinterpreted.

**Two-step flow:** Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) suggest a **two-step flow model**, in which messages flow in two distinct steps:

- 1 From the media to opinion formers – people who directly receive a message, such as a news report, are interested enough to want to relay it to others and influential enough for them to take note of the message.
- 2 From opinion formers to people in their social network, those who receive the original message in a mediated form – edited, condensed, embellished – from people like family and friends (*primary groups*).



### KEY TERM

**Two-step flow model:** normative model of media effects that argues that messages flow from the media to opinion formers, who then interpret such messages for people in their social network.

In this **normative model** of media effects, Katz and Lazarsfeld argue 'informal, interpersonal relations' are the key to understanding how mass audiences responded to media messages. Any behavioural changes result from how messages are interpreted, discussed and reinterpreted within primary groups, rather than from any direct media influence. This idea is supported by Shannon and Weaver's concept of noise; the original message easily becomes lost, over-simplified and misrepresented through social interactions. In this respect, Klapper (1960) concludes that mass communication 'does not serve as a necessary and sufficient cause of audience effects'. Rather, it functions in highly selective ways, in terms of:

- perception – people notice some messages but not others
- exposure – people choose media messages consistent with their beliefs
- expression – people listen to the opinions of people important to them
- retention – people remember things that fit with their beliefs and forget those that do not
- selection – some messages are never relayed.



### KEY TERM

**Normative model:** model of media effects that argues that the key to understanding how mass audiences respond to media messages is through a knowledge of how messages are filtered through informal, interpersonal relationships.

*Reinforcement Theory* is related to flow/diffusion models in that it focuses on the social context of media use. How the media affects people depends on the social groups to which they belong. Klapper, for example, argues that people's beliefs are related to their social groups (primary groups being the most significant). One important role of a secondary group such as the media was to reinforce, either positively or negatively, the beliefs already formed. This suggests a very limited type of 'media effect'.

**Uses and gratifications:** This model takes the separation between media and audience a step further by arguing that consumers pick and choose both media *and* messages; they use the media for a range of gratifications. McQuail et al. (1972) suggest four primary **uses and gratifications**:

- Entertainment – as a **diversion** from everyday life.
- Social solidarity – talking about a shared experience, such as seeing the same film or television programme or playing the same online game, serves an integrating function by making people feel they have things in common.
- Identity – to create or maintain a sense of ‘who we are’. It is a resource, from reading lifestyle magazines to maintaining a Facebook presence, used to construct and maintain and project a sense of self.
- Surveillance – providing news and information about an increasingly complex world.



#### KEY TERMS

**Uses and gratification:** normative model of media effects that argues that consumers pick and choose both media *and* messages. The media are used by audiences to gratify their own particular uses and needs.

**Diversion:** break from everyday life, to relax, for mental stimulation and so forth.

Severin and Tankard suggest another use – companionship – when they found the heaviest media users were those who were lonely or socially isolated.

Overall, therefore, the uses and gratification model suggests the media is:

- powerless, in terms of its ability to directly influence or change behaviour
- neutral, in the sense of not having any direct effect on attitudes
- unimportant as far as researchers are concerned, since the object of study is the active *audience* rather than the media.

Although the idea of active audiences is important in understanding media effects, particularly as they relate to old media, its significance may be overstated in two respects:

- Stam (2000) claims that limited effects models ‘essentialise the audience’ by giving them an

unwarranted and unsupported primary significance in terms of how media messages are interpreted.

- Diffusion models suggest the media has few, if any, effects, yet advertisers spend billions each year precisely because they believe the media has clear and direct effects that can be measured in terms of sales.

#### ACTIVITY

*Divide into groups. Each group should produce a diagram to summarise the main features of one theory/explanation of how the media affects audiences. Groups can then comment on the effectiveness of each other’s diagrams and suggest improvements.*

### Impact of the media on behaviour, violence, deviance amplification

Conventional analysis of the media’s impact on behaviour tends to focus on its *negative* impact. This ranges from encouraging violence to creating a docile, manipulated audience. However, it is also important to understand the positive effects that the media can have.

#### Negative impacts

There are three key ways to view negative media impacts:

- Across society as a whole, which involves noting some general economic, political and cultural negatives.
- Across social groups – as an example we can look at how the media contributes to moral panics.
- At the individual level, where we can look at the media as a causal or contributing factor to violent behaviour.

#### Societies

In economic terms, large media corporations divide up global markets and operate as oligarchies that:

- prevent entrance to media markets
- restrict competition
- limit consumer choice.

Lechner (2001) argues that this creates media homogenisation by developing a ‘consumerist culture, in which standard commodities are promoted by global marketing campaigns to create similar lifestyles’.

Politically, one impact of new media in particular has been the extension of surveillance and a loss of personal privacy. Governments and private companies

have exploited the capacity for information gathering afforded by new media to extend population surveillance. Mobile phone and satellite technology, for example, can be used both to track individuals and to monitor their contacts, while social networking sites collect, store and sell extensive personal information about users to advertisers.

Culturally, global media encourages a cultural hegemony that colonises local cultures with the products and lifestyles of dominant cultures. One example of this is the global domination of the US film industry or the influence of brands such as Coca-Cola and Nike. On a more individual level, Kraepelin (2007) notes how 'popular teen magazines link appearance and consumerism'. Here, globalised media contributes to the development of a consumption culture in which the buying of goods and services, from mobile phones to social networks funded by advertising, is an end in itself.

These negative impacts are explained by traditional Marxists in terms of manipulation theories. These suggest that the media directly influences audience perceptions and beliefs. In a mass society characterised by social isolation and alienation, the media becomes a source of mass culture through the agency of what Adorno and Horkheimer (1944) term a 'culture industry'. Audiences are uniquely receptive to whatever the media transmits because there are few links to alternative sources of information. The media reflects other forms of industrial production in capitalist society by creating various elements of a popular culture, such as film, magazines, comics and newspapers. These are all consumed uncritically and passively by the masses. Through control of the culture industry, a ruling class controls the means of mental production, and populations, as Schor (1999) puts it, are 'manipulated into participating in a dumbed-down, artificial consumer culture, which yields few true human satisfactions'.

### Deviance amplification

Wilkins (1964) developed the concept of **deviance amplification** to show how the development of crime and deviance involves a positive feedback loop:

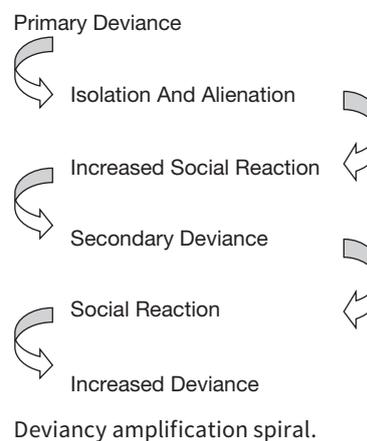
- initial or primary deviance is identified and condemned by the media, which leads to ...
- the deviant group becoming socially isolated and resentful. This behaviour leads, through a general media labelling process, to ...
- an increased social reaction (including the development of a moral panic) by the media, politicians and formal control agencies; there is less toleration of the original deviant behaviour. This develops into ...
- secondary deviation, involving an increased level of deviance. As a consequence ...
- the reaction from the media, politicians and police increases, leading to new laws (the criminalisation of deviants) or increased police resources to deal with 'the problem'.



#### KEY TERM

**Deviance amplification:** theory of deviance that argues that a range of social reactions, particularly those orchestrated through the media in terms of moral panics, have the effect of creating more serious forms of crime.

In this way, each group, deviant and control, feeds off the actions of the other to create a 'spiral of deviance'. Moral panics created by the media are a crucial component of this.



**Moral panics:** Cohen (1972) defines a moral panic as a situation in which 'a condition, episode, person or groups of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests'. Although the media is central to the development of moral panics, their precise role is explained differently by different sociological approaches.

Interpretivist approaches see 'societal values' as emerging from day-to-day interactions and experiences – people construct the social world in terms of a range of ideas that are simply taken for granted. Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) argue that interpretivists see moral panics

arising from ‘anxiety in the grassroots of communities’. The role of the media in modern societies is to express public concerns. By representing groups that threaten social cohesion as ‘deviant’, the media focuses public concern and leads control agencies such as the police and courts taking action. According to this perspective, moral panics develop spontaneously out of a general public concern towards behaviour that threatens the that moral order. Cohen suggests that moral panics reinforce established moral values in two ways:

- by setting moral boundaries for acceptable behaviour
- by creating a sense of social and moral solidarity at a time of change and uncertainty.

This approach sees the media as a channel that amplifies, rather than creates, public concern. Media audiences are seen as ‘active and critical’ consumers rather than passive recipients of media representations. If an audience chooses to ignore media concerns, a deviancy amplification spiral does not occur. Hilgartner and Bosk (1988) argue that responsibility for moral panics is also shifted away from the media because a range of social problems exist in any society at any given time. Any of these social problems may cause public concern and lead to moral panic. Those who ‘work in various public arenas attempt to surf on the shifting waves of social problems’. Whether one form of behaviour or social group is targeted for action by the media depends on those occupying middle levels of power, such as police officers, politicians and civil servants, convincing media outlets that a problem exists – something they do to enhance their own power. Those who are seen to resolve a moral panic gain prominence.

Neo-Marxist approaches examine moral panics across two dimensions:

- How and why they are created by powerful groups.
- How they contribute to the maintenance of elite hegemony.

Neo-Marxists understand moral panics as political phenomena – the defence of a certain type of moral order defined by a ruling class but shared, to varying degrees, throughout society. Moral panics are an important way for a ruling class to exercise control, by focusing condemnation on a particular ‘moral threat’. While moral panics are in some ways manufactured as **media sensationalism**, this does not mean they are necessarily deliberately created. At various times,

capitalist societies offer up opportunities for moral panics and elites take advantage of these to criticise those who threaten both moral order and, by extension, ruling-class hegemony.



#### KEY TERM

**Media sensationalism:** process whereby the media attempt to increase the dramatic content of an issue or story.

For Hall et al., opportunities for moral panics occur at times of economic, political and ideological crises in capitalist society. Their function is to distract public attention from the real causes of such crises by generating panics around groups and behaviours that create easily identifiable scapegoats or ‘folk devils’. These people are relatively powerless and can be subjected to physical control on a tide of ‘public moral indignation’. This type of crisis is rare, however, and a more mundane explanation for moral panics is that they represent periodic attempts to establish moral order by taking action against those who challenge it. In relation to deviancy amplification, for example, this operates on two levels:

- the surface reality of different types of deviance
- the deeper reality of promoting a particular kind of moral order.

These two levels are linked, of course, and expressed through the agency of the media. To protect and enhance the moral order, folk devils must be identified and blamed. Scapegoating performs two main functions:

- It distracts attention from ‘real moral issues’ (such as large-scale social inequalities).
- By allowing the full force of control agencies to be directed at moral deviants, the public is both co-opted and warned; behaviour that challenges the existing moral order will be met with force.

From this perspective, moral panics trigger increased surveillance and control of subject populations through both the media and other control agencies. In addition, such steps are taken with the consent and co-operation of those being controlled. Rather than being a cause of moral panics, deviancy amplification is actually a result of it. Where the object of moral panics is usually seen as deviants, for neo-Marxists, the real object of control is the population as a whole.



Why is the behaviour of young males frequently the object of media moral panics?

In this way, the media is responsible for creating moral panics, with the intention of controlling the behaviour of those who support action against deviants. Each panic results in greater levels of control, until a situation is reached where public surveillance and control is an integral part of everyday life in a way that is both welcomed and accepted in order to ensure 'public safety' – which, for neo-Marxists, means 'the interests of powerful elites'.

Livingstone and Hargrave (2006) suggest that the media plays a significant role in the development of moral panics. They note that contemporary concerns over 'teenage boys shooting classmates, fears of increasing xenophobia [hatred of 'foreigners'], rising levels of obesity or appalling murders with sexual elements are commonly linked back to the (mis)use of particular types of media content, be they delivered by film, television, the internet, advertising or even print'. There are, however, other causal links between the media and these negative effects:

- Television – there is some evidence to suggest that 'under certain circumstances, television can negatively influence attitudes in some areas, including those which may affect society (through the creation of prejudice) and those which may affect the individual (by making them unduly fearful, for example)'.
- Video – there is evidence that consumption of 'violent (non-consensual) pornography' results in 'more negative or aggressive attitudes and behaviours towards women as well as supporting the desire to watch more extreme content', although the evidence for the effect of viewing online pornography on children is limited.
- Internet – while this is a wide-ranging form of media, there is some evidence that various forms of harm exist, from online bullying to 'the grooming of children by paedophiles'. Violent video games have also been linked to the development of violent behaviour in young and 'vulnerable' adults with 'particular personality disorders', although this, as we will see, is disputed.

### Violence

The idea that exposure to violent media, from television and internet depictions of real-life violence to violent films and video games, contributes to or causes violent behaviour, especially among vulnerable groups, is a pervasive one across many cultures. However, evidence for this is not as clear-cut as some sections of the media suggest.

**Theories:** One of the most common connections between the media and violent behaviour is *imitation*. This explanation stems from social learning studies such as Bandura et al.'s 'Bobo doll' experiment. Different groups of children witnessed an adult behaving violently. The play of each group was then observed and it was discovered that those children shown violent behaviour subsequently played violently. This leads to the idea that immature and vulnerable audiences simply imitate the behaviour they see. This explanation that recurs throughout various media from time to time:

- In the USA, for example, two students, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, shot dead 12 of their fellow students at Columbine school in 1999. Their actions were subsequently explained in some parts of the media as a consequence of playing 'violent video games', *Doom*, in particular.
- In the UK, the murder of three-year-old James Bulger in 1993 by two 10-year-old boys was attributed, by the judge at their trial, to a violent horror film called *Child's Play 3* rented by the father of one of the boys and which it was assumed they had watched. There was no evidence they had.

*Cultivation theories*, Chandler (1995) notes, involve the idea that 'heavy media consumption' cultivates attitudes that are 'more consistent' with the content being consumed than with the mundane reality of everyday life. Heavy consumers of violent films and television, or those who spend a lot of time playing violent, immersive, video games, develop a 'violent mindset'. These individuals see the world as a more violent place than it actually is, and this can induce violent real-world behaviour. Gerbner (1994) argues that powerful and pervasive media in

global societies creates mythical realities for audiences, and heavy media consumers find it difficult to distinguish media myth from reality. They are drawn into a world where reality is distorted and violence is constantly presented as a glamorous solution to individual and social problems.

*Social-developmental models* reject the idea that there is a relatively simple one-way relationship between the media and violence (i.e. that media violence makes people more susceptible to real violence). Huesmann and Miller (1994), for example, argue that there is a more complex, reciprocal, relationship between the media and the audience. Early social development is influenced by 'cognitive scripts', ideas that people develop through childhood experiences, which tell them how to behave appropriately in certain situations. These scripts are influenced by many different factors, such as whether the individual was subject to violence and abuse during their formative years, or whether they were exposed to violent media. These 'learned scripts' subconsciously determine how people respond to real-world situations. Those whose cognitive scripts involve seeing violence as a way of dealing with problems, for example, are more likely to exhibit violent behaviour in certain situations, such as when they are placed under great stress or fear.

If this is true, it can be difficult to separate cause and effect in the relationship between the media and its audiences. **Discourse analysis**, for example, shows that, while many media discourses argue that 'violent people' consume violent media and then commit acts of violence because of the 'thrill' they get from it, an alternative interpretation is that for certain audiences, violent behaviour is something they are socially programmed to enjoy, whether it is real or imaginary. However, while the two are connected there is no way to tell which causes the other: do people play violent video games because they like violence or do these games make them violent?



#### KEY TERM

**Discourse analysis:** method of media analysis that examines how language shapes the way people think about something.

*Desensitisation theories* are based on the development of emotional responses to media violence. The more a person is exposed to media violence, both real and fantasy forms, the more likely they are to accept real-world violence. This occurs on an individual level, where

the desensitised believe that violence is an appropriate response to certain situations. It also occurs on a more general cultural level – these people are more likely to accept violence as 'a way of life'.

#### TEST YOURSELF

Identify and explain two negative media impacts on behaviour.

#### Positive impacts

Most interest has focused on the negative impacts of media. However, there is also a range of positive impacts that should not be ignored:

- 1 Diversions involves the idea the media is used positively for a range of everyday purposes, such as relaxation or entertainment.
- 2 Education – media can be used for educational purposes, both consciously, for something like information gathering, and subconsciously, where learning, in its widest sense, is embedded in entertainment such as video gaming.
- 3 Community – where different forms of media are embedded in everyday life, experience and discourse they are a significant basis for social interaction, such as talking about the latest events in a soap opera, discussing the news or arguing about who should be evicted from reality TV programmes. This shared knowledge helps to create a community of interest in the sense that people feel part of a social group on the basis of their common interests and preoccupations. Even in the virtual world of social networks or message boards, where people may not physically know each other, like-minded people can discuss the things they find important.
- 4 Identity consolidation – for some, the media is used for identity checking on two levels:
  - Individual: where people create or maintain a sense of personal identity through the media they consume. This can involve things such as lifestyle magazines or creating and maintaining a sense of self through the consumption of cultural products such as literature and film.
  - Social: the media can define particular forms of social identity, from class, through age and gender to ethnicity, by explaining the meaning of these categories and, in doing so, shaping ideas about individual, communal and national forms of identity.

- 5 Empowerment – post-feminists have argued that new media can be empowering for particular gender and age groups because it allows greater freedom of personal expression and identity creation. Butler (1990), for example, argues that, where gender scripts were once limited and restrictive, forcing men and women into a limited range of identities, they are now many and varied. Thanks to the media, people have much greater awareness of the different ways they can ‘perform gender’. This is also true for perceptions of age-related behaviour. Haraway (1991) takes these ideas a step further with her concept of ‘the cyborg’. As people increasingly interact in cyberspace, traditional notions of gender and biology become redundant. How people are connected in cyberspace is more significant than how they are connected in ‘the real world’ because interaction across computer networks can be *agendered*; gender, as with class, age and ethnicity, can be hidden or disguised.
- 6 Awareness – in a complex world, the media provides news and information that can be used to keep in touch with what is happening. A significant positive impact, therefore, is the creation of a greater global awareness of:
- Economic trends, such as the development of countries like China and India as important production centres.
  - Political developments – events surrounding the 2011 Arab Spring, for example, were extensively reported through Twitter in the absence of more traditional media.
  - Cultural exchanges involving a greater exposure to and understanding of cultural similarities and differences.

### TEST YOURSELF

Identify and explain two positive media impacts on behaviour.

The media may also promote political changes by exposing people to new ideas that makes them question traditional ways of thinking and behaving. Increased media choice and diversity brings with it a willingness to question ‘authority’. Lyotard argues that a defining feature of postmodernity is its ‘incredulity towards **metanarratives**’ such as religion, science or political philosophies, that claim to explain ‘everything about something’. Such incredulity, he suggests, means the media is less likely to influence people’s behaviour negatively.



### KEY TERM

**Metanarrative:** a ‘big story’ that attempts to explain ‘everything about something’ or, in the case of religious and scientific metanarratives, ‘everything about everything’.

The ability to make quick, easy and direct contact with like-minded individuals through new media networks also contributes to the general political process through greater participation and activism. New media also change the nature of political representation: the public can not only interact directly with elected politicians, through email and social networks, they can use it to pressurise politicians and parties to act in particular ways. New media open up greater opportunities for discussion and self-expression, giving groups a voice who may not have had one in the past. This, in turn, has a significant impact on how we understand the deviance of political leaders or large-scale transnational corporations. For example, both are under increasing surveillance ‘from below’.

### ACTIVITY

#### Discussion

*The negative impacts of the media outweigh their positive impacts.*

### Problems of researching the effects of the media on audiences

As we have seen researching media effects can be problematic. In this section, we consider this idea in more depth by looking at media definitions, methodology and audiences.

#### Definitions

In order to research something there must be a broad agreement about how it can be defined. Without such agreement, it is impossible, for example, to compare different explanations of media effects because they may be measuring different things. While there is a tendency to see ‘the media’ as a relatively simple, homogeneous, category, closer analysis reveals this is not the case. Contemporary forms of media are characterised more by their diversity than their similarity. Although we could define the media simply in terms of ‘mass communication’, this hides a range of differences in how and why the media communicates with an audience.

These differences are important in assessing how we can measure the effects of the media. In this respect, media diversity relates to two main areas:

- 1 Different types of media, from newspapers, books and magazines, through television and film to video games and social networks. Research conducted in one medium may have little or no application to other forms of media.
- 2 Old and new forms of media. The point to consider here is whether consumption of old media, such as a newspaper, is similar to consumption of new media, such as a social network. A significant research problem, therefore, is the changing nature of the media. Both a film and a video game can draw the viewer into a world that only exists on screen, but a video game is interactive – the audience's actions and choices change how the drama unfolds. This involves both a significant difference in the nature of the media and makes researching effects more difficult, because the distinction between producer and consumer – on which most effects theory rests – is decisively blurred.

So, old and new media do not necessarily affect audiences in similar ways. To put this in context, when researching crime, it is unlikely we would consider the motives for murder as similar to those for car theft. The same is true when studying media effects. The only thing watching a two-hour television drama and spending the same amount of time playing the online video game *World of Warcraft* may share is that they are both classified as 'mass media'.

A second area to note is how concepts like 'violence' are operationalised. This relates to two areas:

- The media portrays many different types of violence, from the real-life brutality of news broadcasts through fictional violence to cartoon violence.
- We cannot simply assume that an audience will interpret representations of violence in a particular way; different audiences may interpret meaning in very different ways depending on their social characteristics, such as class, age and gender, and the context in which the violence is seen.

A third area to note is the meaning of 'an effect'. Just as there is no general agreement about whether effects are direct or indirect, strong or weak, long term or short term, there is no agreement about what is or is not a 'media effect'. Is an effect something that produces a clear and immediate behavioural change in an audience, or one that produces a slow, cumulative change? The problem here is

that finding a 'media effect' may owe more to how such effects are studied than to any real change in audience behaviour.

### TEST YOURSELF

Suggest one way in which changes to the media might affect how it can be studied.

### Methodology

If the media is difficult to define and effects difficult to operationalise, it follows that different methods may measure different things to give different results, depending on what the researcher is looking to test. One set of problems here, for example, relates to whether effects can be measured:

- quantitatively, using something like **content analysis**
- qualitatively, using something like **semiotics**
- using a combination of the two.



### KEY TERMS

**Content analysis:** research method used for the systematic analysis of media texts and communications.

**Semiotics:** the study of signs, codes and symbols used in communication processes.

A further methodological problem relates to the different meanings and interpretations of media content. For example, a researcher may interpret something in a different way to the audience. This can be a particular problem with new media, if the researcher is less familiar with it than the subjects of their study. Rose (2007) argues that a researcher requires a thorough understanding of their subject matter if they are to identify and understand the **symbolisation**, codes and conventions involved. A semiological analysis of the Indian film industry, for example, would be difficult for a researcher with little or no knowledge of this culture and genre. Alternatively, Livingstone and Hargrave argue that in relation to rap-music lyrics, 'different people do not interpret content in the same way'. For example, there is a difference between



### KEY TERM

**Symbolisation:** the idea of conveying meaning through symbols.

the interpretation of ‘fans of a genre vs. those who only occasionally view’ and this, they argue, makes it ‘risky to draw conclusions about media effects’.

How a medium is researched also creates problems when measuring effects. Experiments are unusual situations and respondents may behave differently inside and outside a laboratory’s controlled environment. Where research is carried out in a ‘natural environment’, such as in the home, it still may not be possible to anticipate all behavioural influences. Uncontrolled independent variables range from a simple awareness of being studied to the context in which media is set and consumed. Livingstone and Hargrave also suggest that the consumption context affects how it is experienced and hence its possible effect. This relates to:

- physical consumption – whether this is shared or consumed alone
- mental consumption – how different audiences understand the context of the behaviour portrayed in something like a television programme, for example the extent to which they identify and empathise with those portrayed.

Livingstone and Hargrave believe that one of the problems with media research is that it ‘demonstrate[s] short-term effects on attitudes and behaviours, among a particular research sample, such as college students, under particular conditions’. While these effects are real, they question the reliability and validity of generalising results that have been obtained from very specific groups under very specific conditions to large groups under different conditions.

In addition, it is difficult to know how research carried out in one society, such as India or the USA, can be applied to different societies that have different:

- cultures – where there may, for example, be different levels of tolerance to violent and sexually explicit content
- media regulations governing what can be shown in media such as television
- media content.

Research into the influence of the media on violent behaviour is full of methodological problems. Sociological research in this area has usually been conducted through field studies, using questionnaires, interviews and observation. Belson’s (1978) study was based upon in-depth interviews with 1565 teenage boys in London. Boys with high television exposure were compared to those with low exposure. Belson drew the conclusion that

those boys who had seen a lot of television had committed 49% more acts of violence than those with low exposure. However, Belson’s work has been criticised for failing to distinguish adequately between high exposure to television in general and high exposure to violent television programmes in particular. Howitt (1992) has also pointed out that Belson’s results actually show that there are three types of viewer: those with light, moderate and high exposure to television. Of these, it was actually those with a moderate level of exposure to violent television programmes who were more prone to commit violent acts. It appears, therefore, that Belson’s work can be interpreted in several different ways. This is a good example of both the methodological difficulties in studying the influence of the media and the difficulty of making direct links between TV violence and social behaviour.

### TEST YOURSELF

Briefly explain one methodological problem with studying media effects.

### Audiences

Postmodernists take a different theoretical approach by suggesting that conventional effects theories look for the wrong things in the wrong places in the wrong ways. In this respect, they question three major assumptions on which conventional ‘media effects’ theories are based:

- Undifferentiated mass audiences are now rare; audiences are increasingly fragmented by age, gender and ethnicity, as well as by more individualised categories such as cultural and technological competence. This makes it impossible to think about how ‘the media’ impact on behaviour.
- Media literacy: conventional effects research generally fails to credit audiences with any understanding of the media they consume, particularly the conventions employed by media producers. For postmodernists, contemporary media users have far higher levels of understanding and cultural competence than consumers in the past and this ‘active audience’ dimension makes conventional forms of effects research problematic.
- Producers and consumers: conventional effects research takes for granted the distinction between those who produce media and those who consume it. This means that research is designed to measure how one affects the other. This presents two main problems:

- With various forms of new media in particular, from websites through blogs to social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, consumers *are* producers. This makes it increasingly difficult to maintain the distinction on which much conventional media effects research rests.
- Similarly, there is a tendency to assume a separation between ‘the media’ and ‘the audience’, such that the effect of the former on the latter can be quantified. Staiger (2000), however, argues that audiences are increasingly *perverse spectators* – they use media in their own way and for their own means through activated meanings created by how they interact with media. This creates, in effect, an uncertainty principle: the meaning of a TV programme, for example, is created by how it is consumed, such that the meaning of a drama or news broadcast changes each time it is viewed

by different individuals. It is therefore impossible to quantify a media effect in any meaningful or coherent way because, Staiger argues, any ‘impact is changed each time it is identified’.

#### ACTIVITY

*Think about how you would design a research activity into the effects of the media on social behaviour. How would this activity differ if it was conducted:*

- *in one individual’s home*
- *in a single town of 30,000 people*
- *in an entire country.*

*How would the context affect what types of evidence you focused upon.*

## Summary points

### Media ownership is split between:

- private ownership
- state ownership.

### Two main perspectives on ownership and control are:

- Marxist:
  - instrumental – manipulative model
  - neo-Marxist – ownership – hegemony and core values.
- pluralist:
  - competition
  - economic
  - ideological
  - choice
  - managerialism.

### Three main theories of the nature and role of the media are:

- instrumental Marxism, which views media as:
  - ideological institution
  - instrument of class oppression
  - agency of social control
  - manipulative
  - mass society
  - mass culture.
- neo-Marxism, which views media as:
  - hegemony
  - manufacturing consensus
  - agenda setting
  - producer capture.
- pluralism, which views media as:
  - information diversity
  - choice
  - audience capture
  - competition
  - ‘the death of the author’.

### Theories of selection and presentation of media content are:

- pluralist:
  - consumer choice and diversity.

- Marxist:
  - agenda setting
  - legitimating values: positive and negative
  - gate-keeping.
- postmodern:
  - discourse
  - narratives.

### Debates about the relationship between the media and the state:

- Marxism:
  - instrument of the state
  - delivers hegemonic social control
  - implements censorship and regulation.
- pluralist:
  - autonomy
  - supportive and critical of government.
- new right:
  - self-regulation
  - market discipline.
- postmodernism:
  - globalisation
  - information freedom.

### New media

#### Issues:

- digital piracy
- new economic models of production and distribution
- hacking
- viruses
- personal and data privacy
- surveillance from above and below.

#### Implications:

- optimism:
  - decentralisation
  - globalisation
  - harmonisation
  - empowerment.
- pessimism:
  - exploiting free labour
  - driving out quality
  - privacy
  - copyright
  - conglomeration.

## Exam-style questions

- 1 **a** Explain the factors that influence the content of the news. [9]
- b** Assess the view that the media reflect the interests and values of all groups in society. [16]
- 2 **a** Explain the role of the media in creating moral panics. [9]
- b** Assess sociological explanations for how television may influence the behaviour of audiences. [16]
- 3 **a** Explain how the media may serve the needs of the individual. [9]
- b** Assess the view that the messages audiences receive from the media directly influence behaviour. [16]
- 4 **a** Explain how the media can be used to support the interests of the ruling class. [9]
- b** Assess the view that the media acts as an agency of state ideological control. [16]

**Total available marks 100**

**Theories and impacts of media effects:**

Direct:

- hypodermic syringe / magic bullet model
- transmission models.

Indirect:

- cultivation theory
- audience reception theory.

Limited:

- two-step flow
- uses and gratifications.

Negative impacts:

- cultural hegemony
- mass culture
- deviancy amplification
- moral panics
- violence:
  - social learning theory
  - cultivation theories
  - social-developmental models
  - desensitisation.

Positive impacts:

- diversions
- education
- community
- identity consolidation
- empowerment (post-feminism)
- promoting political awareness and change.

**Problems of researching media effects:**

Changing media:

- intra-medium diversity
- inter-medium diversity.

Methodological:

- content analysis:
  - meanings
  - interpretations
  - fragmented audiences.
- semiotics:
  - subjectivity
  - interpretations
  - codes and conventions.
- experiments:
  - artificial situations
  - construct and ecological validity
  - controlling the environment
  - consumption contexts.

**Changing audiences:**

- mass media?
- mass audiences?
- producers or consumers?
- interchangeability of producer and consumer.