A-Level Sociology

The Mass Media

Chris Livesey

Contents

Defining
the mass media

Mass media refers to communication with large numbers of people, something traditionally seen as '**one-to-many'** communication: one person (such as the author of a book), communicates to many people (the audience) *simultaneously*.

This basic idea can, of course, be extended to include "a newspaper" or "a television programme" being "the one" that communicates - but the basic principle is always the same.

This simple definition does, of course, hide a number of complexities - how large does an audience have to be, for example, before it qualifies as 'mass'? - and we can note **Dutton et al** (1998) suggest that, traditionally, the mass media has been differentiated from other types of communication (such as **interpersonal communication** that occurs on a **one-to-one** basis) in terms of a range of essential characteristics. Communication between those who send and receive messages (*information*) is:

- **impersonal**,
- **lacks immediacy** and is
- **one-way** (from the producer / creator to the consumer / audience).

There is, in this respect, both a *physical* and *technological* **distance** between sender and receiver: everyone receives the *same message* and the audience cannot directly interact with the sender to change or modify that message.

Mass communication is **organised** and requires a vehicle, such as a television, computer or phone that allows messages to be sent and received. It is inescapably bound-up with **technology** because a mass medium allows large-scale **simultaneous** communication with many people.

A popular UK television programme, such as Dr. Who or Sherlock can draw around 8 - 10 million viewers, while the global audience for something like the football World Cup runs into hundreds of millions.

Mass communication may also be **commodified** - it comes at a price. You can watch films on TV, for example, if you can afford a television, a license fee (to

"One-to-many" communication.

watch BBC or ITV) or a subscription to a satellite or cable company, such as Sky or Virginmedia.

Although these characteristics still hold true for the **traditional mass media** (newspapers, magazines, books, television, radio, film and so forth), the picture has been complicated - and in some respects completely changed - by the development of newer, computer-based, technologies that don't fit easily into all but the last of the characteristics we've just outlined (mass communication comes with some sort of price tag...).

This follows because newer technologies, such as mobile (cell) and smartphones or personal computers have the capacity for both **interpersonal** ('one-to-one') communication and **mass** ('one-to-many') communication.

Email, for example, can involve exchanging personal messages with friends and family or sending one message to many millions. Over the past 10 - 15 years, therefore, the development of computer **networks** such as the Internet have changed both the way we *relate to*, *use* and, most significantly *define*, what we mean by *mass media*. Their development also raises the interesting question of whether we should now be talking about *many mass mediums* rather than *the* mass media…

Computer networks, in this respect, open up the potential for '**many- to-many**' communication; a mass audience can simultaneously communicate with each other to create a mass medium based on interpersonal communication.

The commodification of mass media

Various forms of **social media**, from Facebook to Twitter, arguably conform to two of the components of a 'mass medium' - technology and scale - and commodification is, arguably, a third component, although this is complicated somewhat by the question of *what,* or indeed *who.* is actually being commodified in this particular instance.

Distance is, however, a problem because social media can, simultaneously, involve one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many communication:

Peer-to-peer networks, using software to link individual computers to exchange information, is another example of **many-to-many communication**. In the workplace, for example, any number of people can contribute to the same document at the same time - although perhaps one of the most common (and frequently illegal) use for peer networks is to share copyrighted music and films. Computer networks also open-up forms of **interactive** communication that change how we define the mass media, in terms of the relationship between the **production**, **distribution** and **consumption** of information.

These ideas suggest that, at the very least, we need to redefine conventional concepts of **mass media** by distinguishing between two forms:

Who or what is being commodified through social media?

While an audience can accept or reject the information transmitted , they play no part in its production, nor can they change it. The roles of producer and consumer are, in this respect, both different and *clearly differentiated*.

2. **New media** not only allows for simultaneous two-way communication, it also changes the producer - consumer relationship; someone who sets-up their own web site, writes a blog, maintains a presence on Facebook or regularly uses Twitter is both the *producer and the consumer* of media information. In this respect consumers are also active producers and the roles of producer and consumer are both similar and *largely undifferentiated*.

A YouTube gaming channel where the producer is the consumer.
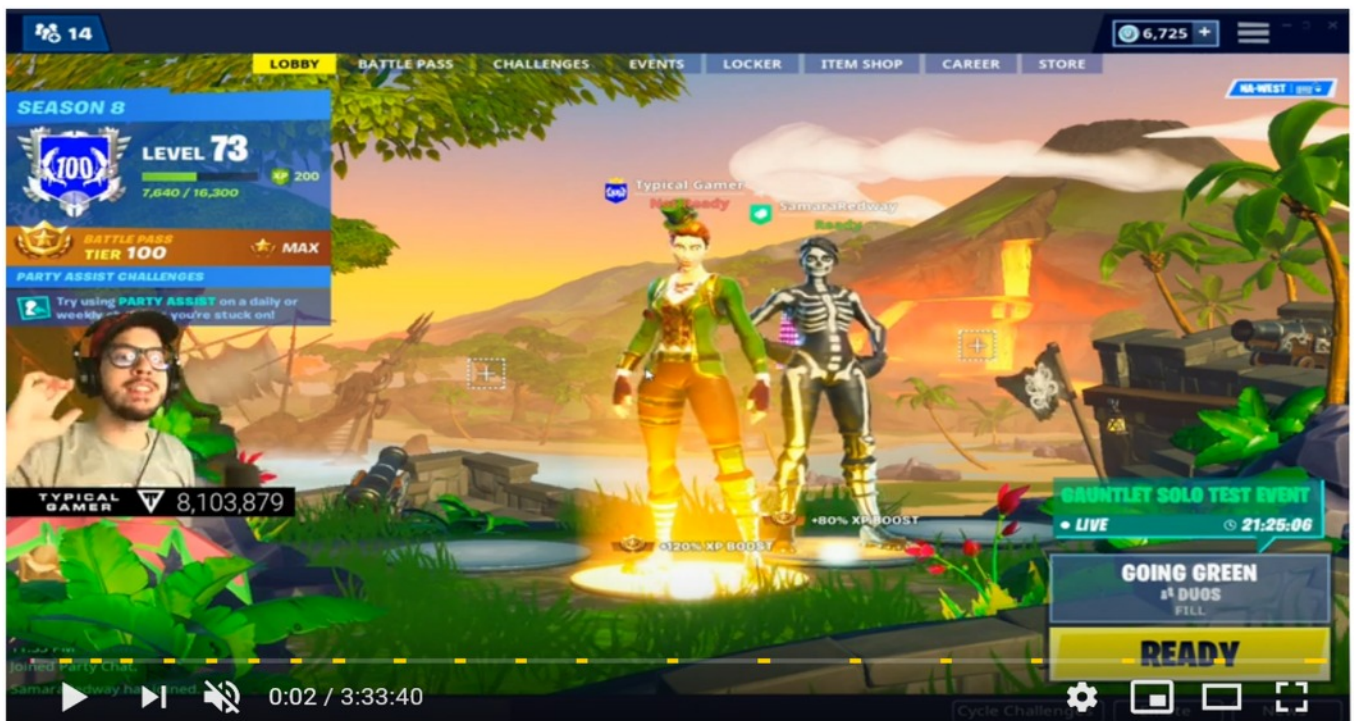
1. **Old media**, such as television, books and magazines involve 'one-to-many' communication, based on a one-way process; information is produced and distributed by a media owner, such as the State or private corporation, and this is **passively consumed** by a mass audience.

Researching the mass media

Crosbie (2002) has argued new media has three characteristics that make them very different to other forms of mass media:

- They can't 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 vast numbers of people.

- **Collective control** means each person in a network can share, shape and change the content of the information being exchanged.

The distinction between old and new forms has important implications for our understanding of the mass media in terms of ideas about ownership and control, the selection of media content and the possible effects of the mass media on audiences that will be explored in more detail in subsequent sections.

*Conventional debates, for example, have focused on the extent to which the media, as a **secondary socialising agency**, determines audience behaviour.*

*Similarly, debates over something like **censorship** - in terms of access to various kinds of information - have been transformed by the development of new media.*

1. Content analysis

Quantitative forms of this research method are a statistical exercise, based on a content analysis **grid**, that involves *categorising* and *quantifying* aspects of behaviour to *systematically* reveal underlying patterns and themes in the media.

Meehan's (1983) study of US daytime television, for example, revealed the limited number of stereotypical roles played by female characters at this time and suggests this form is particularly useful for identifying and classifying **recurrent themes** in a media text, such that quite complex forms of social interaction can be explored.

In a slightly different way **Hogenraad** (2003) used computer-based content analysis to search historical media accounts of war to identify key recurring themes that signify the lead up to conflict. The objective here was to identify the *ideological markers*, transmitted to the audience that signified support for aggression.

Similarly, **Miller and Riechert** (1994) developed the idea of **concept mapping**, where computer technology is used to identify and describe 'themes or categories of content in large bodies of text'.

For **Page** (2005) this involved using computer technology to analyse different texts (such as newspaper articles going back many decades) to search for key words or phrases indicating the use of similar ideas or concepts - an idea similar to **tag clouds** where the most popular search options appear as larger text on a web site.

Page was interested in the social construction of global warming and he used "content analysis of prominent media streams from the mid-80s" to investigate whether or not the media advanced a **dominant interpretation** of this concept, as either a man-made or natural phenomenon.

In this way content analysis can be used **longitudinally** to track how ideas develop or are consolidated and can reveal media **patterns and trends** over a given time period that may be hidden to individual audience members.

This idea applies not just to *national* media - differences in understanding, interpretation and emphasis across *international* boundaries can also be revealed by content analysis.

We can illustrate these ideas further by outlining examples of research on "gender scripts" designed to tell an audience how to be male and female.

- **McRobbie** (1977) argued female identities - as depicted in the pages of Jackie", the best-selling teenage magazine of the time - were shaped by a "narrow and restricted view of life", marked by "Romance, problems, fashion, beauty and pop", coupled with an "idealised and romanticised" view of boys. Jackie girls inhabit a world of "romantic individualism" where the objective is to find and keep "her man".

- **Ferguson's** (1983) longitudinal analysis of women's magazines described a "cult of femininity" revolving around traditional female values of caring for others, marriage, and concern with appearance. The general message was women should define themselves in terms of male needs.

- **Sharpe's** (1976) study of teenage girls found female identities were shaped around "love, marriage, husbands, children, jobs and careers, more or less in that order".

- **Cumberbatch** (1990) found TV adverts used male and female identities in different ways - older men and younger women were more likely to be used than other age groups. The former featured heavily when an advertiser wanted to convey authority, especially when an advert featured technical expertise, while young women were used to convey sexiness.

- **Best** (1992) demonstrated how pre-school texts designed to develop reading skills are populated by sexist assumptions and stereotypes about males and females.

- **Kraeplin** (2007) examined how popular magazines aimed at teenage girls linked personal appearance with consumerism and consumption ("Women are constantly being made aware of their imperfections, then offered products that will help them attain the socially constructed ideal").

- **Ward** (2016) examined how the content of celebrity messages on Instagram affected the largely female fanbase response to different messages.

Evaluation

These examples, although relatively recent, largely predate the development of **new media** and this adds a new layer of diversity to the range of information now available; one that that questions the kind of "cosy consensus" about gender represented through these studies, since the idea of a media consensus is more difficult to sustain where both access to and consumption of media has changed.

Cumberbatch's study, for example, was based on two commercial TV stations; there are now many hundreds of channels available.

Robson (2002) also points to a couple of **methodological strengths** of content analysis.

Firstly, it's an **unobtrusive** method; data can be taken from texts without the need to interact with research subjects. Consequently, there are few **ethical** problems with this type of research. In addition, the researcher doesn't rely on a respondent's memory or personal knowledge which removes a layer of potential bias from the research process.

Secondly, **reliability** is improved through the ability to **replicate** the research - something made easier by the unchanging nature of the source material.

In terms of **weaknesses**, while content analysis uncovers themes within texts, it doesn't tell us much about how audiences understand - or decode - media messages. Just because a theme is present, it doesn't mean an audience recognises it or necessarily accepts it.

Methodologically we have to assume identified patterns aren't simply *artefact effects* - a product of how data is classified. How a researcher categorises the content they observe, for example, may suggest a pattern of behaviour that is neither present nor has any affect on people's behaviour in the real world.

In addition, where the analysis involves making judgements about the categorisation of behaviour - the researcher decides the categories used - this may lower *reliability:* different researchers may use different categories or different criteria for placing behaviour into similar categories.

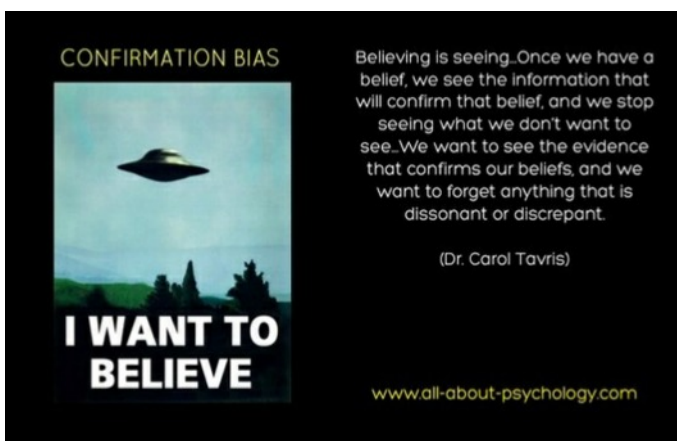**Qualitative forms** of content analysis take a different approach.

Conceptual (or **thematic**) analysis, for example, extends quantitative analysis by focusing on the concepts or themes that underlie media content such as news reports and magazine articles.

Philo and Berry (2004), for example, identify recurring themes in news reports of the Israeli - Palestinian conflict, such as language differences when referring to similar forms of behaviour; Palestinians were frequently classed as 'terrorists' while Israeli settlers were called 'extremists' or 'vigilantes'.

Relational (or **textual**) analysis examines how texts encourage readers to see something in a particular way.

Hall (1980) refers to this as a **preferred reading** - how a text is constructed, through the use of language, pictures and illustrations, for example, subtly "tells" the audience how to interpret the information presented. Professional sport in British popular newspapers, for example, is frequently presented in a way that suggests it is almost exclusively a male activity.

In terms of **limitations**, the depth and complexity of qualitative analyses makes them labour-intense and time consuming, while the **subjectivity** of the analysis introduces **reliability** problems - different researchers may interpret the meaning of the data differently, depending on their initial theoretical perspective.

CONFIRMATION BIAS

Believing is seeing...Once we have a belief, we see the information that will confirm that belief, and we stop seeing what we don't want to see...We want to see the evidence that confirms our beliefs, and we want to forget anything that is dissonant or discrepant.

(Dr. Carol Tavris)

I WANT TO BELIEVE

www.all-about-psychology.com

They are also prone to **confirmation bias** (*cherry-picking*); it's relatively easy for a researcher to interpret data in ways that confirm their initial hypothesis, while ignoring data that doesn't fit neatly into the hypothesis.

2. Semiology

Semiology is the study of **cultural meanings** embedded in media forms and, as **Stokes** (2003) suggests, is frequently combined with content analysis to produce a more-rounded picture of media texts through its ability to explore and interpret the 'hidden messages' embedded within texts. In this respect, semiology is based on two fundamental ideas: **signs** and **codes**.

Danesi and Perron (1999) define **signs** as:

"*something that stands for something, to someone in some capacity*"

while **Saussure** (1974) argues signs consist of two ideas:

1. The **signifier** - the particular form taken by a sign.

 2. The **signified** - what the sign represents.

The word "natural", for example, is a signifier for something "not artificial"; however, it can also represent a range of different ideas, depending on the context.

In **advertising**, for example, "natural" is frequently used to signify ideas like "good" and "healthy" (even though there are numerous things in nature that are neither good nor healthy). This general idea can be further expressed in terms of two levels of **meaning**:

1. The **denotative** or what something *is* - a literal representation.

2. The **connotative** - what something **means**.

*A light bulb denotes a source of light.
But what connotations can it have?*

Signs always have a meaning - although the meaning can differ from group to group or culture to culture.

In our culture a man giving a woman 12 red roses might intend to symbolise his love or affection; doing the same in Russia symbolises death - even numbers of flowers are only given to people at funerals.

Chandler (2009) notes "the meaning of a sign depends on the code within which it is situated"; codes "provide a framework within which signs make sense".

Codes, therefore, refer to **conventions** that "need to be learned" and language itself is an example of the relationship between signs and codes. The meaning of a word (sign) depends on the grammatical context (code) within which it is located.

Codes have three significant features:

1. They are an **integral** part of communication - language cannot function without them.

2. They must be **shared**; in any communication system everyone needs to understand the cultural codes being used; where two people don't speak the same language, for example, they often use **visual codes** (*non-verbal communication*) such as hand gestures, as a way of finding some common grounds for communication.

The death of love?

These features of coding means semiology can be used to analyse media texts in two ways:

Firstly. to understand how **conventions** are used by media organisations to convey a variety of messages - from selling *things*, such as consumer goods, to *ideas* - such as lifestyles of ideologies*.*

Advertising, for example, uses simple codes to encourage people to both **consume** and, of course, consume the "right things" (an advertiser's product rather than that of a rival). **Jhally's** (1987) study of 1000 U.S. television commercials, for example, looked at how product advertising is **framed** in relation to different target audiences, such as males and females - something that involved two processes:

● inventing qualities for products that define the **essence of their existence** (such as "the science bit" in the advertising of female cosmetics).

● **disconnecting** products from their overt, practical, use and reconnecting them to a range of abstract qualities. This allows *consumers* to invest products with the qualities they personally desire. Where one floor cleaning product is much like any other, the advertiser seeks to imbue their product with desirable, but abstract, properties (ease of use, efficiency, time saving…).

Probably just tired?

3. Codes can create "hidden meanings" within a text - advertisers, for example, use words like "natural" as a cultural code to suggest "health" (using a variety of visual cues to embed this association) without actually having to support the claim their "natural product" is indeed healthy.

Death Cap mushrooms:
perfectly natural and perfectly poisonous
(the clue is in the name)

Jhally combined **content analysis** - identifying the characteristics of different types of advert - with **semiology** to uncover how products are sold to different audiences using different cultural appeals:

- 75% of adverts aimed at men were focused around transport, alcohol and personal care.

- 60% of adverts aimed at women focused on personal care, food and drugs.

Jhally found the most common codes involved **testimonial appeals**; associating the product with someone the audience:

- *admires*, using popular personalities to endorse a products

- *wants to be*, using "idealised" individuals: fantasy figures the consumer could be if they bought the product

- *is* - using "ordinary people" with the same characteristics as the target consumer.

Semiologically, therefore, it's possible to identify codes used by something like advertising that cover a range of possibilities:

- from **exclusions** - repetitive messages that exclude or drown-out rival interpretations , "b*ecause you're worth it*".

- through **associations** between something culturally desirable, such as status or sophistication, and the product: "designer clothing" is a good example here,

- to **disassociations**; trying to ensure a product is disconnected from associations that may damage its image.

Secondly, semiological analysis allows us to understand *why* various conventions are used by the media - something that, for Marxist approaches, involves ideas about **power** and **manipulation**.

Althusser (1972), for example, suggests semiological analysis reveals the *ideological assumptions and manipulations* underpinning media texts and, by so doing, demonstrates how:

"*knowledge is constructed in such a way as to legitimate unequal social power relations*".

Contemporary consumption sites such as Instagram have taken "celebrity endorsements" to a whole new level of influencing…

For **Althusser** media texts are part of the **ideological state apparatus** in capitalist societies; they promote ideas favourable to the interests of a ruling class in increasingly sophisticated ways using a variety of devices - one of which, as we've suggested, is through **preferred readings**. Newspaper headlines and subheadings, for example, tell the reader what to expect before they've read the article, while captions tell an audience what a picture **means.**

The **Glasgow Media Group** (1976) show how semiology can be used to identify the **assumptions** that lie behind the presentation of television news. Their analysis of how **industrial disputes** were portrayed illustrated subtle (and not so subtle) forms of bias:

- Employers, for example, were generally filmed in a relatively calm environment (an office, behind a desk) and the reporter would ask respectful questions the employer was allowed to answer without interruption.

- Employees, often simply identified as "striking workers", were most often pictured outside and the questioning was more aggressive with the emphasis on the employee justifying their actions.

Evaluation

Rose (2007) argues semiology has a range of advantages:

● it requires very few resources.
● is relatively cheap to carry out.
● **reliability** issues, while always relevant, are less so when the researcher isn't necessarily trying to **generalise** their findings from the group they are studying to wider society.

Although it is an *interpretive method*, analysis can be grounded in **empirical research** (as with, for example, the **Glasgow Media Group**) and can be combined with quantitative forms of content analysis to produced *triangulated research*.

Does semiological research involve taking a privileged position whereby the researcher is both judge and jury on the meaning of the behaviour they're studying?

Semiology provides useful tools for analysing the meaning of media texts, to demonstrate how and why the media construct "social realities" in fundamentally ideological and manipulative ways (from selling products to selling ideas).

Marxism, in particular, has used semiology to reveal how various cultural conventions, such as social and economic inequality, are presented as "natural", inevitable and unchangeable. Where semiological analysis is underpinned by **empirical** research it provides insights into the way powerful groups, from corporations to political parties, use the media to influence public perceptions and opinions.

Semiological analysis does, however, tend to be on much weaker ground in relation to how audiences understand and interpret media messages and codes. We can't, for example, simply *assume* that because a researcher is able to uncover "hidden meanings" in a text this is necessarily the case for a casual audience. **Rose** also points-out that a researcher requires a thorough grounding in their subject matter if they are to identify and understand the codes and conventions involved; a semiological analysis of Hollywood films, for example, would be difficult for a researcher who had little or no knowledge of cinema.

A more-fundamental criticism, particularly as it applies to Marxist analysis, is the belief that media messages are **layered**; "core ideas" are embedded in layers of seemingly inconsequential ideas.

The "real message" of advertising, for example, is not about buying one product rather than another; it's about *consumption*.

This assumes there are "real" messages that can be found by peeling back the layers under which they're disguised and the researcher gives themselves a **privileged position** - someone who "knows the real meaning" of media messages.

When **Hebdidge** (1979), for example, writes about 'the meaning of style' in youth subcultures, he argues some punks wore Nazi swastikas in an 'ironic way'.

Young (2001), however, argues, that whatever the truth of this assertion it is simply an interpretation unsupported by evidence.

Ownership and Control

Debates over the relative importance of media ownership and control are traditionally framed in terms of the significance of a **separation** between ownership of, and management roles within, media companies to prevent, as **Mobbs**' (2002) argues individual owners exerting 'Undue influence over, or bias in, content'. This debate is explored further through an examination of different **theoretical explanations** of the relationship between ownership and control.

Owners, in this respect, are a social group with two dimensions: **Private** ownership involves companies run for profit by individuals, families or shareholders. Rupert Murdoch, for example, owns a controlling interest in News Corporation, a company that publishes books, films and magazines and broadcasts satellite TV programmes.

State ownership involves ownership by governments. In China, for example, the government directly controls media content (the media is **state-run**); in Britain the BBC is controlled by a Board of Governors who, although directly appointed by the government, have a degree of independence from direct political control in terms of programming decisions.

The main significance of ownership in this context is that owners have the potential to decide what sort of information an audience receives through the media they control (something that reflects a form of **censorship**).Private owners, for example, may decide not to publish a book critical of their company, whereas state-owned companies may be subject to political control and censorship over what they can broadcast or publish.

Controllers, such as a newspaper editor, manage a company on a day-to-day basis, and while they may have a shareholding in the company (a notable **trend** in media ownership, partly because gains in the value of shares are taxed at a lower rate than income), they are not outright owners of the company.

Trends and Patterns

Concentration

The first pattern we can note is media **concentration**; the media is owned by a relatively small number of large corporations and powerful individuals. Over the past 50 years the **trend** has been for fewer and larger media owners - something we can illustrate with the example of commercial television. When this was legalised by the Television Act (1954), 9 different ITV companies provided programming for distinctive English regions; following various mergers, acquisitions and takeovers, ITV now consists of a single company. A similar process of concentration has occurred across most if not all media, including English national newspapers.

Owner	Channels
BBC	BBC 1 - 4, various cable channels
ITV Network Ltd	ITV 1 - 4, various cable channels
Channel Four Television Corporation	Channel4, E4, More4, Film4
Viacom	Channel 5
Sky UK	Satellite network of subscription-based channels (Sky 1, Sky Sports etc.)
VirginMedia	Subscription-based cable network distributor of various channels (terrestrial and satellite).

English television channel ownership, 2018

Daily Mail, Mail on Sunday	Daily Mail and General Trust
Daily and Sunday Mirror, People, Daily Star, Daily Star Sunday, Daily and Sunday Express	Trinity Mirror
Daily and Sunday Telegraph	Telegraph Group
Guardian, Observer	Guardian Media Group
The Independent - now online only, Independent on Sunday	Alexander Lebedev
i	JPI Media
Sun, Times, Sunday Times, News of the World (closed July 2011); Sunday Sun (2012)	News Corporation (Rupert Murdoch)

English newspaper ownership, 2018

Although ownership patterns give some indication of concentration, **Press Gazette circulation** figures (2019) provide a further dimension in terms of sales:

Just over 5 million daily newspapers are bought in England, (down nearly 50% from the number bought in 2012).

Around 60% of these sales are from two groups: News International / Daily Mail and General Trust.

Of the 7 million Sunday newspapers sold (down slightly from 7 million in 2012), Trinity Mirror / Daily Mail and General Trust account for 60% of these sales.

Prior to the closure of the News of the World - the largest circulation newspaper in the UK - in the wake of a phone-hacking scandal, News International accounted for around 50% of *all* Sunday sales. The first issue of the "Sunday Sun" sold 3 million copies, although It now averages around 1.5 million copies.

A related trend here is the drift towards **oligarchy** - a situation where a relatively small group of powerful owners effectively controls a market. While competition occurs *between* companies, their size and market share makes it very difficult for competing companies, unless they are very large and are able to command huge resources, to break into a market.

Global concentration

The concentration of ownership is not simply **a national trend**; it is part of a long-term *global trend*. **Compaine** (2004), for example, notes the global media market is dominated by seven giant corporations, including Disney and News International, while **McLiesh et al's** (2001) examination of media in 97 countries found most large media firms are owned by private families.

While in the past the concentration of ownership was often seen as significant in terms of **product diversity** - the idea consumers were offered a limited range of similar media products - in contemporary societies greater emphasis is placed on the extent to which media concentration affects **information diversity**. A wide range of products from which to choose - such as 9 daily newspapers in England - means very little if they're all saying much the same thing and promoting a generally very similar worldview.

McChesney (2000), for example, argues we have the "appearance of choice" in various media – lots of different products all selling much the same sort of (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), however, disputes this interpretation – the *global trend* is not necessarily for increased concentration because, he argues media organisations are not static entities - they develop, grow, evolve and disappear.

The dominant global media companies in the 20th century, for example, are not necessarily dominant in the 21st century, an idea we can illustrate with a couple of examples:

Firstly, 20th Century Fox, founded in 1935 and one of "Big Six" American film companies for much of its existence, was taken over by the giant media corporation the Walt Disney Company in 2019.

Secondly, Myspace, founded in 2003, was the most visited social networking site in the world until 2008 - when it was overtaken by a small, but expanding, company, called Facebook, that didn't exist until 2004.

In 2019 Facebook is one of the world's most successful Internet sites, with:

- around 2 billion active monthly users,
- revenue of over $50 billion a year,
- profits of nearly $7 billion a year,
- a net worth of around $130 billion.

In 2011, Myspace was sold for $35 million (and subsequently resold in 2016 to Time Inc. For an undisclosed price)

Welcome to the world's largest and coolest social media site. In 2008.

Conglomeration

A second trend in patterns of ownership is **conglomeration;** the same company, through a process of diversification, develops interests across different media. Fininvest, the media company owned by Silvio Berlusconi, for example, has a diverse range of interests that include television, book, newspaper and magazine publishing.

Compaine (2004) suggests conglomeration as a general process and trend has a number of related features:

Vertical integration involves a company owning or controlling all aspects of production, distribution and exchange; this allows it to expand its interests into different, but related, markets.

Disney, for example, is a film studio that also owns cinemas and cable television channels where their films can be exclusively shown once their cinema run is over. This type of integration has advantages for a media company by guaranteeing markets for products while simultaneously excluding competitors from those markets.

Horizontal integration involves a company expanding its interests across the *same* market, such as owning different newspapers that appeal to different demographics. **News International,** for example, owns newspapers that cover the populist tabloid market (The Sun) and the upmarket broadsheet sector (The Times).

Horizontal integration is, in this respect, a strategy designed to increase sales in diversified media markets; The Sun, for example, is unlikely to appeal to those who buy The Times.

Same owner. Different markets.

Diagonal integration involves cross-media ownership used to enhance the profile and profits of separate businesses. News International, for example, used its ownership of The Sun newspaper to promote the launch of its satellite television company Sky Broadcasting using reader competitions, special offers and promotional stories.

News International also bought the Hollywood film studio 20th Century Fox to ensure a steady supply of first-run films for its subscription-based film channels.

A final conglomeration trend involves **synergy**, which **Campbell et al** (2009) define as a cooperative process whereby different *versions* of a product are sold in *different* markets.

The Marvel comic book character Ironman, for example, is also a popular film franchise as well as being marketed in video games.

Synergy also involves the interaction between two or more processes that creates something bigger than the sum of its individual parts: the blog that becomes a book, a television series and feature film franchise.

Theoretical Explanations

This section introduces two opposing explanations - **Marxist** and **Pluralist** - of the relationship between owners and controllers that will be developed in more detail when we look at the selection of news.

Traditional Marxism

For traditional Marxism, capitalist society involves a distinction between two social classes: the **proletariat** (or subject class) and the **bourgeoisie** (or ruling class); the latter's ownership of the means of production makes them economically powerful and this power is used to decisively shape how people think through their *ownership and control of ideological (or* cultural) institutions, of which the *mass media* is the most important and influential in contemporary societies.

In some ways, therefore, this represents a **determinist** approach in the sense the media is able to shape people's general thoughts and behaviours.

For Traditional Marxists, the media is part of the political and ideological **superstructure** in capitalist society; its role is to propagate and patrol values supportive of the *status quo,* shaping how people see the world through a range of legitimating ideas. These include:

● a general support for capitalism;
● rationalising and justifying social inequalities;
● defending the concept of private property, the private ownership of profits and so forth.

Possible alternatives to capitalism (such as socialism or communism) may also be *negatively portrayed* as part of the overall *legitimation process*.

The media, therefore, are a tool (or i*nstrument* - this is sometimes called an **Instrumental Marxist** approach) used by a ruling class to propagate a **dominant ideology**, based on beliefs favourable to the interests of the bourgeoisie. This is made possible, **Miliband** (1969), argues, because the ruling class shares a common economic and cultural background, the latter created and reinforced through common educational (public schools, Oxford and Cambridge Universities) and family networks.

A recent example to illustrate the idea of *common economic and cultural backgrounds* is the Conservative Party politicians David Cameron and Boris Johnson.

Both attended Eton College (current (2018) fees around £30,000 per year), both attended Brasenose College, Oxford University (where they were both members of the Bullingdon Club) and both rose to prominent government positions - Cameron as Prime Minister and Johnson as Foreign Secretary.

Oxford University Bullingdon Club members (1987). David Cameron (standing, 2nd left) and Boris Johnson (seated, far right)
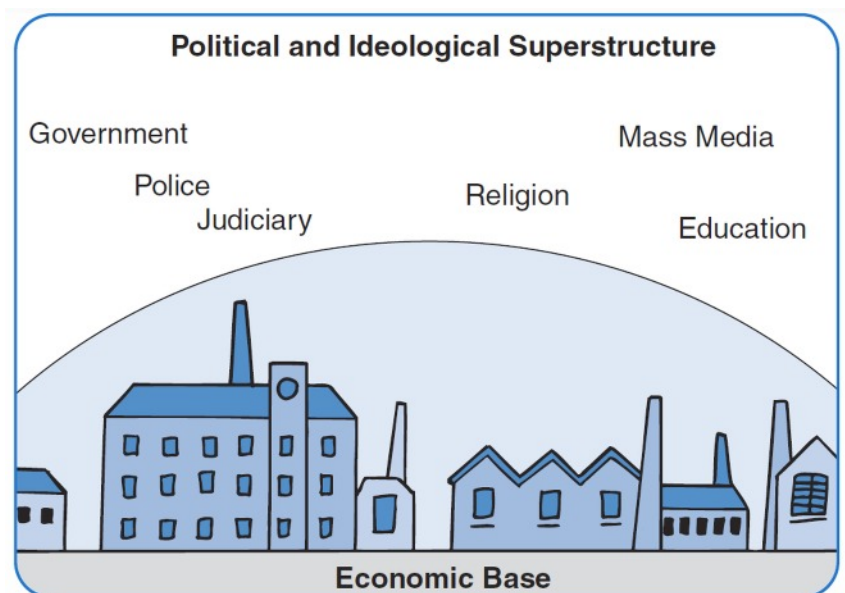
From this perspective, owners ultimately control a company, while managers are employed to oversee its day-to-day functioning: a newspaper editor may, for example, control the stories appearing each day, the hiring and firing of employees and so forth, but owners ultimately control the paper's political stance, the type of audience it aims to reach - and who is or is not employed in managerial roles.

Ownership and control, therefore, are part of a *hierarchical system* under which owners and their managers share a common ideological background and interests which they use to create a sense of **false consciousness**: subject classes cooperate with a ruling class in their own exploitation and against their own class interests.

This is achieved by the media **manipulating** how people see the world, such that rather than seeing it in terms of class conflict they are more-likely to believe societies ultimately function in the interests of everyone: rich and poor alike - an idea encapsulated by the then (2010) Prime Minister David Cameron's concept of a "Big Society" - a society in which people "pulled together" to create a "better and more compassionate society" through volunteer and community work, charitable and small-scale social enterprises and an emphasis on "local people" in "local communities" managing their own affairs.

The flip-side to this "positive perception" is a rather darker form of manipulation, one that suggests nationalist solutions to social and economic problems - from limiting immigration to, ultimately, holding a referendum in 2016 over membership of the European Union (the leaving of which was advocated by the majority of national and Sunday newspapers).

In this respect, the argument here is that by their ability to control the type and quality of information people receive, a ruling class controls and broadly **determines** how people think about society. Control over economic ownership, in other words, gives a distinct social class control over the political narrative.

Evaluation

Traditional Marxist approaches reflect a broadly *instrumental approach* to the relationship between a ruling class and the media, whereby the latter is more-or-less a "willing tool" used by a ruling class to ensure the mass of the population neither understand nor really care too much about how and why they are economically exploited.

Being *falsely consciousness* about the reality of economic exploitation the general population are encouraged to see this as the "normal" and "natural" way of things.

However, while it's generally true that the UK mass media - particularly, but not exclusively, mass-circulation newspapers - do tend to portray the world in this way, it's not always the case. The media has, in recent times, been highly critical of many forms of capitalist behaviour - from "greedy bankers" to environmental criminals.

More-critically, perhaps, the idea a ruling class is a coherent body with members who necessarily share the same interests and consequently act in accordance with this knowledge to maintain their power and privilege has also been questioned, not the least by *neo-Marxist approaches*.
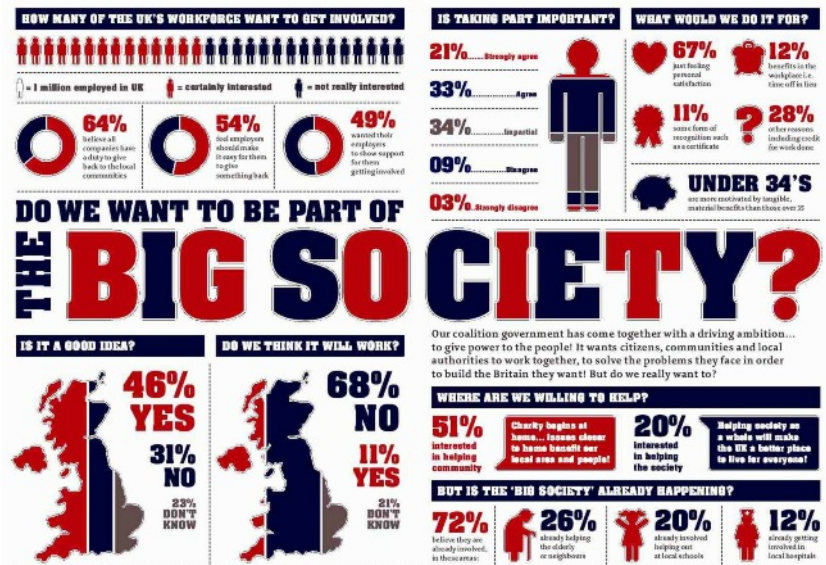
If financial capitalists, such as bankers, and industrial capitalists, such as manufacturers, don't necessarily have much common - the former, for example, make their money through lending, insurance and various forms of financial speculation while the latter actually make and sell physical products - it's difficult to see how they can present a unified view of the world to the rest of society through the media.

The usefulness of concepts like a *dominant ideology* (the idea that one ideological interpretation of the world dominates all others) and *false class consciousness* have also been questioned; even when considered solely in terms of old media people have a wide range of information choices that give access to different economic, political and ideological viewpoints.

The majority of national newspapers were "pro-Brexit" in the 2016 referendum.

The development of *new media* and the massive expansion of online news and information outlets covering every conceivable political, economic and cultural viewpoint makes it increasingly difficult to see how the flow of information can be controlled by a ruling class.

Finally, this approach sees media consumers as *passive recipients* of whatever owners want to publish. Alternative approaches suggest this is both over-deterministic and empirically unsupported.

Neo-Marxism: Relational Class Structure.

Neo-Marxism

While concepts of **class** are at the heart of Neo-Marxist approaches to understanding the relationship between ownership and control, **Wright** (1985) theorises class as a dynamic system of shifting and changing social relationships, rather than a rigid and static classification system, such as the "class pyramid.
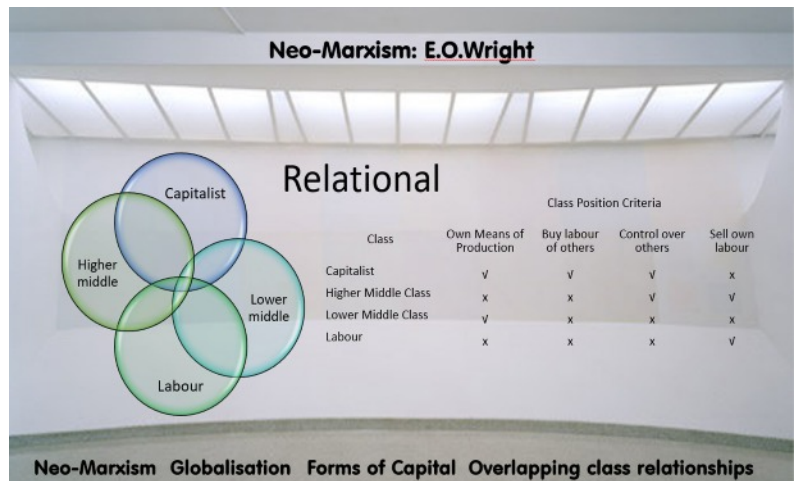
From this perspective *conflict, divisions and contradictions* occur *within* a ruling class as well as *between* a ruling and other classes. These conflicts may be:

● Economic:between different types of capital, such as finance and manufacturing.

● Political: some parts of the bourgeoisie are pro-Europe, others are not.

● Ideological: some parts of the ruling class advocate liberal, free-market, unregulated, global capitalism while others argue for greater regulation as a way to preserve capitalism by ensuring it has the support of the mass of a population.

This dynamic approach means class associations can accommodate ethnic and gender divisions; individuals from some ethnic groups may be economically successful while not seeing themselves culturally as belonging to a (white) middle / upper class.

Media Professionals: occupying a contradictory class position that means they sometimes challenge the demands of media owners?

In addition, **status groups** like professionals and intellectuals (the upper middle classes) occupy, what **Poulantzas** (1975) calls '**contradictory class positions**' – as neither wholly bourgeois nor wholly proletarian and this is important in relation to any explanation of the relationship between media owners, controllers and audiences.

While this relationship is not as simple, straightforward and automatic as Instrumental Marxism suggests, neither is it non-existent, as **Pluralist** critics of this approach tend to argue. It is, as we've suggested, a *contradictory* one whereby some parts of the managerial class may, at some times and under some circumstances, break with the general wishes and beliefs of media owners. The question, of course, is what conditions might prompt such a break?

For Neo-Marxists there's an important distinction to be made between:

● *social structures* – the network of social rules and relationships that bind people together - and

● *consciousness*, people's ability to think, act and make choices that makes it impossible for anyone (let alone a very large group such as a ruling class) to directly determine how people think and behave.

As thinking beings we are aware of our wider relationship to others - and the formal and informal rules that govern our respective behaviours can have a clear and frequently strong influence over how we choose to behave. In relation to the mass media. Neo-Marxism argues that while it must necessarily have some sort of effect on people's thinking and behaviour it is not necessary quick, direct or immediate. Rather, media effects are much more likely to involve slow, cumulative and long-term influences.

Hegemony

Hegemony is key concept for understanding the relationship between media owners and controllers in Capitalist societies because it refers to the idea of "leadership with the consent of the lead"; in other words, media managers generally, though not necessary always, follow whatever political, economic and cultural line is being pushed by media owners for a reasons that range from the idealistic to the realistic:

- they agree with that line
- they see media owners as having a legitimate right to publish information that reflects their views and interests.
- they see owners and managers working together to produce legitimate information.
- "giving the public what it wants" maintains profits and pays their wages.
- they want to keep their job.

Neo-Marxists, therefore, see both owners and controllers locked into a *mutually-beneficial structural relationship* based around profitability: owners must make profits if their business is to survive, while managers rely on it for their jobs, salaries and lifestyles.

Owners and controllers, therefore, have a c*ommon economic interest*, expressed in terms of **core values and beliefs**. They share, for example, a fundamental belief in capitalist economic systems. Marginal disagreements may occur over such things as the most efficient way to make profits, but not over the basic principle itself.

Although owners and controllers share a common cause in promoting and preserving certain basic values - with the mass media the preferred, most-efficient and successful vehicle in contemporary societies - this doesn't mean they always agree on the best way to promote and preserve such values.

Relative autonomy

The contradictory class position to which we previously referred means managers may enjoy **relative autonomy** - the freedom to make decisions, for example, without necessarily taking their instructions directly from owners - because media corporations are too large and too complex to be easily controlled by an owner on a daily basis. They employ, however, managers who can be trusted to reflect their views.

Editors, for example, who insist on ignoring the policies laid down by their employers are likely to find themselves unemployed. As long as its legal (and sometimes if it's not, as the phone-hacking scandal that erupted in 2011 has shown) the key principle and absolutely core value is *profitability;* some media

owners may not care too much about the behaviour and activities of their managers as long as profits continue to flow.

In this respect, and counter to their Instrumental counterparts, Neo-Marxists argue hegemonic control suggests beliefs are not simply imposed 'from above' by a ruling class; **Strinati** (1995), for example, argues dominant groups maintain their position through the 'consent' of subordinate groups - a consent that may. of course, be actively *manufactured* through what **Althusser** (1971) calls **ideological state apparatuses** (ISAs) - socialisation processes carried out by cultural institutions such as the media.

Poulantzas (1975) argues **power** is a further dimension to the role of media ownership and control; he sees this in terms of how it pervades all aspects of a society. The cultural power of the media represents a way of creating a *Weltanschauung* or **worldview** through which the social world is filtered. Media power creates a particular 'way of life', to which the subject classes are continually exposed. In this hegemonic interpretation, media power operates through continuous exposure to a familiar set of ideas that reflect capitalist values.

Bocock (1986) argues, the effectiveness of hegemonic power lies in the way people from *all classes* are encouraged to 'buy into' ideas ultimately favourable to the interests of a ruling class – a simple but effective example being something like the UK National Lottery. Each week millions of people buy a lottery ticket, even though the odds of being struck by lightning (1 in 3 million) are better than their chances of winning the jackpot (1 in 5 million). The point here is that people sincerely *want* to be rich - and everyone has a chance of winning. The fact that for one person to win means millions must lose is just another example of hegemonic power.

On the balance of probability, it's never going to be you.

Criticism of Neo-Marxist approaches to ownership and control are focused around the hegemonic significance of the mass media and the specific ideological role of cultural institutions in capitalist societies.

The development of new *global media forms*, for example, limits the ability of national governments to control information; in the digital age populations are no-longer restricted to information given to them by the mass media.

Not only can they 'search the globe' for a wide variety of information but, as **Weinberger** (2012) argues "*For every fact on the Internet, there is an equal and opposite fact*" - ideas that question the effectiveness of the mass media's ideological role.

Pluralism

An alternative approach is one that stresses how social groups (such as *interest* and *status* groups) compete against each other in the economic market place as they pursue their own particular interests. Such competition may be *economic*, different newspaper groups competing for readers for example, or *ideological* - different political groups competing to promote their views through the media. While media **owners** are potentially powerful players - they are in a position to demand their views are heard and expressed - 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.

Modern media organisations are owned by groups of shareholders rather than all-powerful individuals and where no single shareholder has overall control of a company, *directors and managers* are the main policy-makers, running a company in the interests of shareholders but actually making all the important day-to-day business decisions.

Burnham (1941) called this change in control from the classic *Founder / Owner model* of the 19th and 20th centuries 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 prospective buyers don't like what's on offer then an organisation must either become more responsive to consumer demands or risk being driven out of business by other companies who *will* give the consumer what they want.

This argument contradicts the general Marxist view that consumers get whatever owners and controllers give them, packaged in ways that make the message palatable - and where the ideological content of the media is at least as important - and occasionally more so - than profitability.

For pluralists the reverse is true; media workers focus on giving consumers whatever it is they want because their livelihood depends on knowing what an audience wants and being able to provide it. The ideological content of media messages comes a distant second to profitability. This follows because where media companies must compete for customers, this gives power to consumers; if they don't buy what's on offer the seller goes out of business and the discipline of the market place ensures both competition and that consumers ultimately decide media content.

For this reason, therefore, private media ownership is generally seen as desirable because it promotes competition and diversity. As **Bernard and McDermott** (2002) put it:

'*Current media ownership rules in the UK prevent any one entity acquiring excessive influence in the sector, there*by *ensuring plurality of voice and diversity of content*'.

Modern media organisations: owned by faceless shareholders whose only interest is profits?

Globalisation

From this perspective globalisation has given a new impetus to diversity and competition through what **Davis and McAdam** (2000) call a 'new economic shift'; media corporations have become **networks** operating across national boundaries, with fluid organisational structures making them responsive to new technological developments. These organisations normally have shareholders, such as banks and pension funds. They rarely have individual owners.

Global media networks…

In this respect modern mass media *conglomerates* are **diffuse structures** operating globally in a wide range of different markets and catering for an equally wide range of consumer needs and demands: a situation that produces a plurality of publications - from print to digital media - all focused around consumer demand. The customer is king and diverse audiences produce diverse media.

A further boost to media diversity involves the rapid growth of cheap, widely-available, computer technology, from desktop computers to smart phones, focused around a web-based distribution system (the Internet). This has reduced the costs of media production, made entry into the media marketplace open to many different players and given producers access to potentially global audiences.

Audience Selection Model

A further development that extends the notion of consumer choice almost to breaking point is the idea of an **audience selection model** of mass media.

While the conventional view of the media is that information is produced, published and then consumed or rejected by an audience, *audience selection* argues that increasingly this situation is reversed.
For this approach what increasingly happens in a fragmented national and global marketplace is that a particular audience, highly receptive to the kinds of information that reflects its broad beliefs and views, is serviced by compliant media.

Audience Selection:
Media organisations tailor their content to fit the interests (and prejudices) of the audience segment they're targeting.

Consumers, in other words, choose the kind of ideas and information they want to see or hear and media outlets provide it for them. The audience, in other words, doesn't simply select a preferred set of media from a menu of whatever's available; rather, media organisations examine the market for different types of media and specifically target what they see as the ,most profitable and viable sections. Once identified media content is specifically tailored to and directed at those consumers.

Contemporary examples here might include the Fox News cable network in America or right-wing web sites such as Brietbart.

These are arguably forms of mass media that exist largely to deliver whatever it is their particular audience (and advertisers) want.

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 - we can note a number of basic criticisms.

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

Secondly, although shareholding in media conglomerates is more diffuse now, this doesn't mean significant shareholders don't exert control over a business. Mark Zuckerberg, the founder and owner of of Facebook before it became a publicly-owned company, may now be just one shareholder among many. But his is arguably still the most powerful voice in the organisation.

Managers and Owners:
one and the same in contemporary media organisations?

Mark Zuckerberg:
Not just the face of Facebook?

As Curran (2000) argues, although the power of media owners "*is qualified and constrained by consumers and staff, the suppliers of news, regulators, rival producers, the wider cultural patterns of society, they remain the most powerful actors in these organisations*'.

While owners may no-longer personally oversee the content of the media they own, they are unlikely to employ managers opposed to their social and economic interests.

Thirdly, although the development of the Internet makes it more difficult for owners to control what their audience see, read and hear, old media (such as newspapers and television) generally have far larger audiences than most new media; they may also be **trusted** more by the general public as sources of information. In addition, the diversity of web-based media is overstated, both in terms of the content produced - substantial levels of "news reporting" consists of simple repackaging of old media news gathering and reporting - and in terms of how it is controlled.

Giant corporations such as Apple (through their iTunes store) and Amazon increasingly exert substantial controls over what is published and how it is published, in terms of content **censorship**; Apple, for example, directly controls what may or may not be sold through its on-line store - if a song is deemed unacceptable it is excluded from sale. Individual song titles and lyrics are also subject to strict censorship - and since iTunes currently (2019) has a 63% share of the global download market the ability to exclude products from sale gives it significant control of media content.

Finally. pluralist argue media diversity guarantees consumer *choice*, but **Collins** (2002) argues competition *does not automatically* guarantee media pluralism and diversity. Economies of scale, for example, mean that the majority of consumer demands can be satisfied by a very few giant corporations (Amazon, Google, Apple, Facebook…) that wield huge amounts of economic, political and ideological power - regardless of whether their ownership is concentrated in the hands of a single individual or a wide diversity of anonymous shareholders.

The Selection and Presentation of News

This section looks more closely at some of the factors affecting how media content - with a specific focus on news - is created and distributed: what **Barrat** (1992) calls the '*social context of media production*'.

News, in this respect, is a *label* given to particular forms of information and styles of presentation that, **Allan** (2004), argues, first appeared in Britain in the mid-19th century with the idea of news as an impartial and objective account of a factual reality.

Conventionally, therefore, news is constructed around the notion of *objective* (factual) characteristics that differentiate it from opinion, comment or entertainment.

What constitutes news is always **socially constructed** in the sense it inevitably involves the selection of some types of information, rather than others, for presentation in specific ways - and to understand how, why and by whom news is created out of the vast array of information produced around the world each day we need to understand the roles of some *key players* in its production.

The State

Although different types of government have different rules governing media content - variously expressed as **media regulation** or **censorship** - all governments lay-down basic rules governing what can or cannot be selected as news.

While **China**, for example, operates strict censorship rules across a range of online and offline media and subjects (news outlets are banned from mentioning things like the Tiananmen Square democracy protests of 1989) Western democratic governments rarely engage in such *direct forms* of news censorship outside of material relating to "state security".

China places severe restrictions on the Internet sites and content its citizens can access..

In Britain, **the Official Secrets Act** governs information the government decides is a 'state secret' (or *classified information)* that cannot be legally published. Similarly, **Defence Notices** cover non-classified information about the armed forces. Although this is largely an informal, non-statutory, system, the 'D-Notice' Committee has the power to advise about and, in some instances censor, publication.

Indirect media regulation does, however, occur through the legal system (banning orders can, for example, be used to censor access to Internet sites) and Commissions overseeing media content, a selection of which include:

- the Office for Communications (Ofcom), formally established in 2003.

- the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) that regulates advertising content.

- the Press Complaints Commission (funded by the newspaper industry) that 'dealt with complaints from members of the public about the editorial content of newspapers and magazines'. The PCC closed in 2014, to be replaced by:

- the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO). This exists to adjudicate on claims that a particular publication or publications has broken the IPSO Code of Practice. It's remit, however, is limited to those organisations who have volunteered to meet the standards laid down by the Code.

In addition, a range of *legal rules and regulations* surround areas like:

- advertising - covering things that can and be legally promoted or presented as factual information - and

- general broadcasting (explicit forms of sex and violence cannot be shown on terrestrial television before the 9pm watershed).

A further layer of indirect media regulation involves areas such as **copyright** - how and by whom certain types of information can be used - and **libel**.

Owners

The role of owners in the social construction of news is one that has been discussed and disputed by different sociological approaches - a debate mainly focused on the extent to which owners directly and indirectly influence the production process. This is discussed in more detail in "The Ownership and Control Debate" as well as the concluding section here.

While there are well-documented instances of *direct owner intervention* - **Boardman** (1988), for example, suggests HarperCollins, a subsidiary of News International, commissioned and then decided not to publish a book by Chris. Paten, the ex-governer of Hong Kong, that was critical of the Chinese government - a country where News International had extensive media interests - these appear to be *exceptions* rather than the rule, for two reasons:

Firstly, it is difficult to conclusively prove owners persistently intervene directly in the selection and non-selection of news and where such proof is available it is largely piecemeal and *anecdotal*.

Secondly and perhaps more significantly, direct intervention is rare because owner intervention may be more-subtle and indirect. Where media companies are owned / controlled by powerful individuals, such as Rupert Murdoch or Mark Zuckerberg, they control the conditions under which news is selected and presented by editors and journalists.

Fox News in America, for example, promotes an explicitly conservative news agenda, one that reflects the conservative economic and political agenda of its owner and audience.

Brown (2004), in this respect, argues owner interventions generally take the form of "guidance" and "discussion" with senior editors around issues like hiring journalists who reflect the owner's views.

And not hiring those who do not.

Where media companies have diverse and diffuse ownership, such as large numbers of shareholders with no clearly-identifiable owner, a range of factors may influence how news is generated, selected and produced, examples of which include:

● **Production and distribution** costs, especially those for old media, influence the selection and presentation of content since they impact on things like news gathering. A national media company, for example, has more resources at its disposal (such as journalists and production staff) than a local equivalent - although both use global **news agencies** (such as the Press Association or Reuters) that collect and sell aggregated news content to lower the cost of reporting.

● **Production values** relate to the *quality* of the product presented to an audience. The BBC, for example, routinely spends more on its news programmes than small satellite TV channels. Within different forms of media programming, costs may also vary and this goes some way towards determining how content is selected and presented. Rewriting corporate press releases, for example, is much cheaper than investigative reporting.

● The **delivery** of some physical media (such as newspapers, magazines and books) also restricts the selection and presentation of content. Print media, for example, have space restrictions, with additional costs related to the production of extra pages that don't apply to newer media such as web sites and blogs.

●**Technological costs** are a further factor affecting both production and distribution. A global media company can select programming from a diverse range of sources that are not available to individuals producing small web sites or documenting events in their local community through a blog.

A safe pair of hands?
George Osborne, the ex-Chancellor of the Exchequer in David Cameron's Conservative government appointed to edit a Conservative-leaning London Evening paper.

Editors

The argument owners rarely directly intervene in the selection process is also based on the idea their relationship with media controllers, such as editors, means direct intervention is largely unnecessary.

This follows because the selection and presentation of news relates to a number of *ideological, bureaucratic and organisational considerations* that determine how and why some information is selected as news.

Ideological considerations, for example, are linked to the political, cultural and economic beliefs of owners that arguably determine the overall political stance of a newspaper, magazine, TV channel or web site.

Within this general ideological framework, such as whether a newspaper, tv channel or web site takes a broadly left or right wing political position, **bureaucratic** and **organisational** considerations come into play.

One of the most significant of these is **newsworthiness**: the extent to which some information, out of everything going on in the world, is considered to be news.

The concept of newsworthiness, as **Brighton and Foy** (2007) note, is a somewhat nebulous one as far as individual journalists or media professionals are concerned: it is rarely, if ever, objectively articulated in ways that identify the criteria by which some information is categorised as "news" while other, even very similar information, is categorised in some other way. As they found in their research, journalists were prone to define news as something:

"*I know when I see it*".

They generally relied, in this respect, on apparently commonsensical or, as they preferred to express it, "gut" feelings.

These apparently commonsensical ideas about "what does and does not constitute" news do, however, hide a much deeper, largely unstated but well-understood, set of meanings through which news is actually understood - an idea bound-up in the concept of *news values*.

News Values

Chibnall (1977) defines news values as:

"*The criteria of relevance which guide reporters' choice and construction of newsworthy stories...learnt through a process of informal professional socialisation*".

These are the values used by organisations, such as the BBC and individuals, such as editors and journalists, to guide and underpin their understanding of **newsworthiness:** the stories, among the many generated each day around the world, deemed worthy of being selected and presented as *news*.

This suggests *News* is not a neutral concept; rather, it is an ideological construction that involves things like:

● **assumptions** about what interests an audience.

● **bureaucratic conventions**, such as the rules and agendas that govern how information is collected and from whom it is collected. The views of "significant people" in a society (politicians, celebrities and the like) are routinely sought-out and reported in a way the views of "ordinary people" are not.

● **organisational demands**. Something considered newsworthy for a television channel or newspaper, may not be considered newsworthy for a political magazine or web site.

The significance of news values is how they serve to classify events in particular ways and contribute to decisions made by media professionals, such as editors and journalists, about newsworthiness: how and why certain types of information and sources are selected and presented as news. In this respect it's worth looking at a range of news values researchers have identified over the years, beginning with **Galtung and Ruge's** (1973) classic formulation:

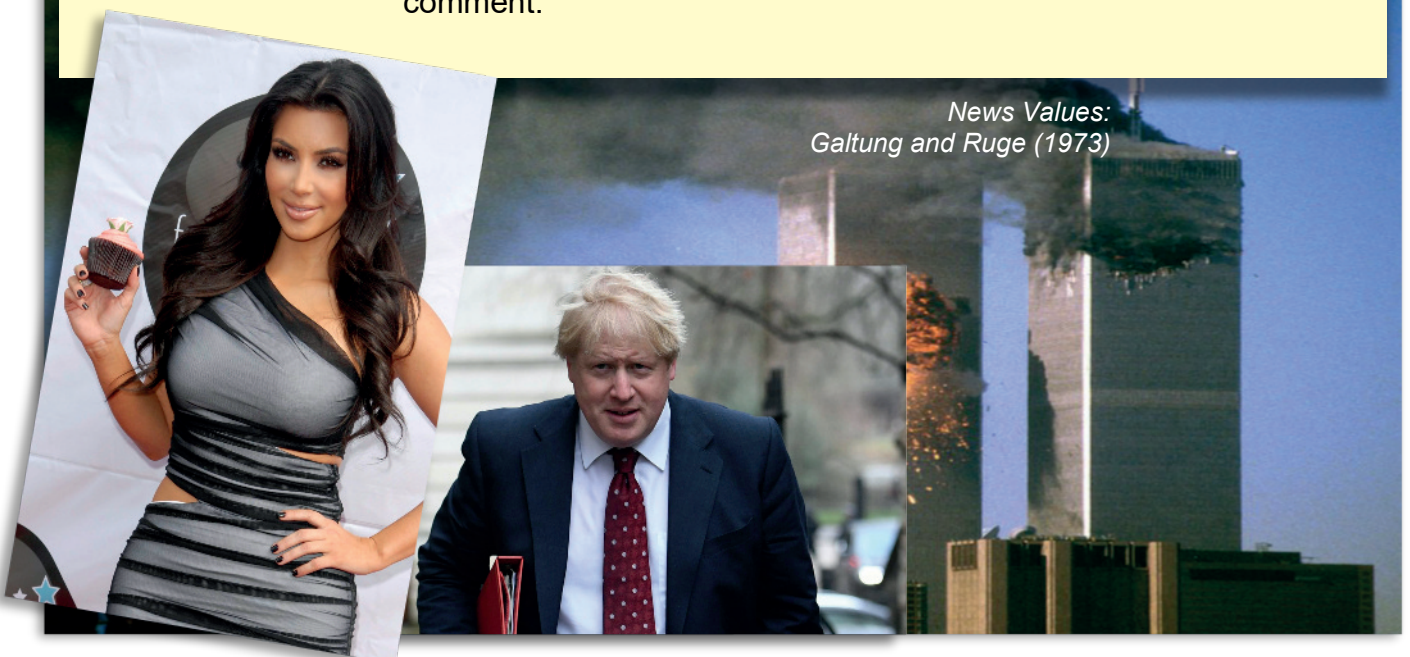| News value	Meaning
Frequency	The duration of an event is a consideration for different media (visual media like to feature fast-moving stories with plenty of action).
Size	The scale and importance of an event - bigger means more newsworthy.
Unambiguous	The more clear-cut an event, in terms of the issues involved, the more likely it will be defined as news. If an event is complex it will be reduced to simple, clear, issues.
Meaningfulness	The closer the fit between the event and an audience's cultural background, the more newsworthy the event.
Consonance	The ability to predict or want something to happen makes it news and relates to ideas such as folk devils, moral panics, self-fulfilling prophecies and agenda setting. If the predicted events don't happen, that too becomes news.
Continuity	The extent to which a news story can be given a context, such as a past and a future.
Composition	News organisations like to feature a mixture of different stories, such as human interest, celebrity gossip, financial news and comment.

News Values:
Galtung and Ruge (1973)

ShortCuts tv

News Value	Meaning
Immediacy	'News' is what's happening now.
Drama	The more dramatic an event, the more likely it is to become news.
Personalisation	'Important people' (defined in terms of the audience) are given more attention and prominence in different media. For The Sun, for example, "news" is more-likely to be defined in terms of the behaviour of celebrities. Stories also have more value if they given a "human interest" angle.
Titillation	Sex is used to sell some newspapers, magazines and TV programmes.
Convention	Events can be explained in ways familiar to an audience and their expectations.
Structured Access	Some people (**primary definers** such as reporters and experts) are given more opportunity to define the meaning of a news event. This involves hierarchies of credibility, where more importance is given to some commentators than others.
Novelty	If an event is unusual, rare or a new angle can be given to an old event, it is more newsworthy.

Chibnall (1977)

News Value	Meaning
Weight	An event's significance in relation to other, current, stories.
Controversy	Arguments and debates, particularly between the rich and famous, increase the value of news.
Usefulness	The extent to which the story helps people to understand the meaning of something.
Educational value	The extent to which people may be taught something of value.

Lanson and Stephens (2003)

shortcutstv.com

Harcup and O'Neill (2017) argue news values are rarely, if ever, explicitly acknowledged or articulated by media professionals. The task of *unmasking* and exposing these underlying values has generally been undertaken by sociologists and media researchers who recognise that news values:

"*inform the mediated world that is presented to news audiences, providing a shared shorthand operational understanding of what working journalists are required to produce to deadlines. It is the way news values work in practice that results in them being articulated and conveyed to new journalism trainees and journalism students, and they are also used by public relations professionals and others aiming to obtain maximum news coverage of events (or pseudo-events)*".

News values, in this respect, are related to both *bureaucratic routines* and *organisational needs* rather than the beliefs and values of individual editors or journalists. Neither, for example, actually have to *personally* hold these values to produce newsworthy stories.

Editors - and, to a more-limited extent, journalists - do however play an important *gatekeeping* role in that they make the specific decisions - informed by their understanding of the particular news values that apply to different media - about which stories count as *news*, which stories don't and which should be considered as something else, such as advertising or opinion.

The role of media gatekeepers, such as a newspaper or web site editor, is essentially to allow consumers access to certain types of information (*what they want you to know…*) and deny access - by not publishing it - to other forms of information (*what they don't want you to know…*).

In this respect the managers employed by news organisations, from editors to television controllers, also have a significant *policing* role in terms of the decisions they make about what counts as the news values of particular organisations. And this role is based on whatever *agenda* is being set by the underlying news values of an organisation.

Agenda setting

This refers to further editorial functions that reflect the specific organisational values of different companies.

An editor is responsible for ensuring the "news agenda" set by owners is followed, while also ensuring journalists understand and conform to organisational news values:

In the UK, *The Times newspaper* doesn't print pictures of topless women, whereas *The Sun* makes this a (*Page Three*) selling point for its audience.

The role of media gatekeepers is one of allowing and denying access to different types of information.

The decision not to report something - the concept of **omission** - is a further aspect of agenda setting. In the 1990s, for example, little or nothing appeared in the British media concerning the British bombing of Iraq following the 1991 war.

More recently, the phone-hacking and bribery scandal uncovered by The Guardian newspaper in 2011 received little or no coverage in News International publications such as The Sun - even those this company was heavily involved in the scandal that involved hacking the mobile phones of celebrities in order to discover gossip and scandal that could be subsequently published.

Finally, most privately owned media rely on advertising for their profitability and one aspect of agenda setting is not to behave in ways that upset advertisers.

The closure of the News of the World in 2011, for example, was partly prompted by the massive withdrawal of advertising it suffered following the disclosure its journalists had hacked the mobile phone of murdered schoolgirl Millie Dowler and, by so doing, hindered the police investigation into her disappearance.

Journalists

As we've seen, *news* is not just 'something that happens'; certain types of information, based in great part on different organisational news values, have to be selected "as news" and presented to an audience in ways that make news understandable.

Journalists are, of course, an integral part of a presentation process and they represent what might be considered the final link in "the social construction of news" chain: their role is not simply one of objective recording and reporting but, as **Hall** (1980) notes, it's rather one of *framing and interpreting* the meaning of a news event for an audience.

News journalists, in other words, don't simply report what they see. They attempt to locate what they see in a shared "universe of meaning" with their intended audience that involves, **Hall** argues, suggesting in numerous subtle, but largely unstated, ways a "preferred reading" of a news event.

The role of news journalists, it's argued, is not simply to tell an audience what has happened but also to tell the audience how to understand and react to what has happened. For **Chibnall** this involves the use of what he calls **legitimating values**: positive and negative ideas used in news reports to provide cultural cues that 'tell' an audience how to interpret a story.

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

Examples of positive and negative legitimating values

New Media, New Values?

While there are arguments about the precise nature of the relationship between the state, owners, editors and journalists, new media developments, such as blogs and social networks, have arguably challenged this general perception of news selection and presentation.

New media, for example, can be **global** rather than national, allowing it to escape restrictions placed by the State on what can and cannot be published. It blurs both the distinction between owner, editor and journalist - new media, with its low start-up and running costs folds these roles into the individual blogger or tweeter, for example - and, **Schudson** (2011) notes, between writer and reader, producer and consumer.

The continuing development of new media, from blogs and news website at one extreme to massive media sites like Facebook at the other, has raised some interesting questions about news values in terms of both their continued relevance to any debate over news selection and presentation and the specific content of contemporary news values.

This is a particularly pertinent debate in the light of claims that new media such as Facebook is not "produced" in the way old media such as a newspaper is produced; content, for example, is broadly user-generated rather than being created by paid professionals.

A counter-argument here, however, is that the kind of "news" disseminated on these very large networks is, by and large, selected from traditional media sources - reposting a story that has been read in a newspaper or online news site, for example. News, in this respect, is subject to a *double-selection process*: firstly it is selected as worthy of being presented in a traditional or old media setting and secondly it is selected for presentation in a new media context.

If the development of new media hasn't necessarily meant a radical deviation from the basic idea of "news selection", it has at the very least raised a few significant questions about how we view the notion of news values.

Firstly, are the kinds of news values we've previously identified as flowing from Galtung and Ruge's original research consonant with new media news values? In other words, are the values that underpin the selection and presentation of news in *old media* the same or very similar to the values underpinning the selection and presentation of new media news?

While there's probably no definitive answer to this question, **Harcup and O'Neill's** *comparative research* does at least provide an insight into a possible answer.

Their 2001 study based on a *content analysis* of "*news stories published in the UK's three market-leading daily national newspapers (The Sun, Daily Mail and Daily Telegraph) during a sample month in 1999*" identified 10 basic news values:

News Value Rank (2001)	Stories	Frequency Rank: Newspapers 2014	Frequency Rank: Social Media 2014
The power elite	Concerning powerful individuals, organisations or institutions.	5th	9th
Celebrity	Concerning people who are already famous.	8th	=7th
Entertainment	Concerning sex, human interest, showbusiness, , animals, an unfolding drama, or offering opportunities for humorous treatment, entertaining photographs or witty headlines.	3rd	1st
Surprise	That have an element of surprise and/or contrast.	2nd	2nd
Bad news	With particularly negative overtones, such as conflict or tragedy: "If it bleeds, it leads".	1st	3rd
Good news	With particularly positive overtones, such as rescues and cures.	9th	=7th
Magnitude	That are perceived as sufficiently significant either in the numbers of people involved or in potential impact.	7th	6th
Relevance	About issues, groups and nations perceived to be relevant to the audience.	6th	5th
Follow-up	About subjects already in the news.	4th	4th
Newspaper agenda	That set or fit the news organisation's own agenda.	10th	10th

Harcup and O'Neill (2001, 2017)

In their *2014 follow-up* study the sample was expanded to cover 10 newspapers, 8 paid and 2 free-distribution dailies (*Metro* and London's *Evening Standard)*.

The news values they identified in 2001 were still present in 2014, but their frequency was subtly different.

"Bad News", for example, was the most frequent news value found in 2014 while it was the 5th most frequent in 2001.

Similarly, these news values were also present on the two top social media sites (Facebook and Twitter) sampled, although again the frequency of various news values was significantly different to both of the newspaper samples.

While this suggests that the kinds of news values H**arcup and O'Neill** identified seem fairly consistent over time and place (across both old and new media) - the prominence of values such as "Bad News", "Celebrity" and "Entertainment" shouldn't be particularly surprising given that these values have been something of a traditional mainstay as a way of "selling news" - they did find a number of "newer news values" underpinning newspaper stories that are increasingly designed to be shared across social media (and Facebook in particular).

News Value	Stories
Exclusivity	Generated by, or available first to, the news organisation as a result of interviews, letters, investigations, surveys, polls, and so on.
Conflict	Such as controversies, arguments, splits, strikes, fights, insurrections and warfare.
Audio-visuals	That have arresting photographs, video, audio and/or which can be illustrated with infographics.
Shareability	That are thought likely to generate sharing and comments via Facebook, Twitter and other forms of social media.
Drama	Concerning an unfolding drama such as escapes, accidents, searches, sieges, rescues, battles or court cases.

Harcup and O'Neill (2017)

In terms of news values, the relationship between old media (such as newspapers), "old new media" (such as online versions of printed newspapers) and new media like Facebook is neatly-summarised by **Phillips** (2012) when she notes:

"*The hugely successful Mail Online creates loyalty by giving readers what it already knows that they want and they know it by observing which stories are the most likely to be shared by Facebook*".

Gatekeeping Too?

A further dimension to gatekeeping involves sites such as YouTube. While such sites aren't primarily news organisations, they contain vast amounts of aggregated news that, as with their print peers, is selected and presented to users. It's just not selected by human beings but rather by computer algorithms - programs that, as Tufekci (2018) notes, analyse user behaviour and promote further information that might be of interest.

As with their human counterparts in traditional media, these algorithms contain hidden biases designed to keep people watching because, as she notes:

"*The longer people stay on YouTube, the more money Google (it's owner) makes*".

The problem, she argues, is that the YouTube algorithm "*seems to have concluded that people are drawn to content that is more extreme than what they started with*".

While this isn't particularly problematic if you're searching for information about, say, pets and are increasingly served information about oddly lovable animals doing adorable things. It does, however, become a little more problematic when:

"*During the 2016 presidential election campaign, I watched a bunch of videos of Donald Trump rallies on YouTube. I was writing an article about his appeal to his voter base and wanted to confirm a few quotations. Soon I noticed something peculiar. YouTube started to recommend and "autoplay" videos for me that featured white supremacist rants, Holocaust denials and other disturbing content.*"
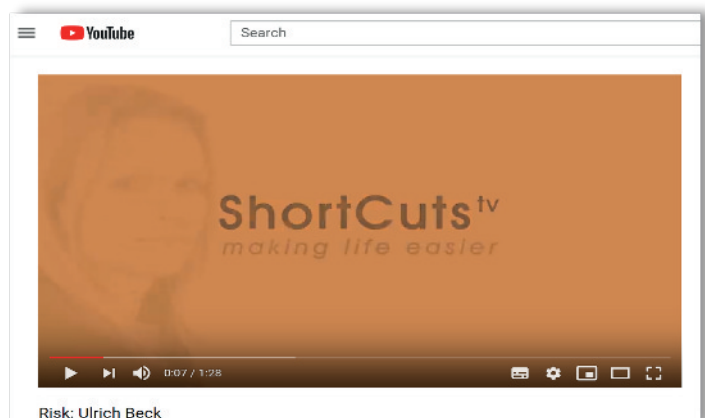
YouTube: Thankfully, it's not all bad…

As she concludes: "*YouTube's recommendation algorithm promotes, recommends and disseminates videos in a manner that appears to constantly up the stakes. Given its billion or so users, YouTube may be one of the m*ost powerful radicalising instruments of the 21st century".

Theoretical Explanations

Thus far we've looked at how *news*, produced and distributed through both old and new media, is socially constructed in terms of concepts like *newsworthiness* and *news values*. We've also outlined how such values are policed across a range of media.

What it would be useful to do next, however, is look at a selection of **Marxist** and **Pluralist** approaches that seek to explain the significance - or otherwise - of the selection and presentation of news.

Instrumental Marxism

This general perspective explores the social construction of news in terms of **power** relationships. Owners and controllers, for example, are both:

● *economically powerful* because they own and control the means of physical production.

● *ideologically powerful* because they own the means of **mental production**, such as newspapers, television channels, web sites, social media networks and the like.

From this perspective this ownership gives them control over how people both *think about the world* and how they behave on the basis of these beliefs. Media owners directly and indirectly control information and, in so doing, propagate a **worldview** (or ideology) that explicitly favours the rich and powerful - the members of a **ruling class**.

This **instrumental approach** to understanding news construction focuses on how a ruling class use their media ownership as a *tool* to manipulate public opinion. The media, in this respect, are a powerful agency of **social control** - a similar role filed by religion in the past - with a number of dimensions:

On a simple level, control is exercised through entertainment and diversions that stop people thinking about how they are exploited and oppressed.

More complexly, those whose views accord with media owners are given **privileged access** to the media - as experts, for example. Ideas favourable to a ruling class are consistently highlighted and promoted; newspapers and television channels, for example, consistently promote the views of "business leaders" while alternative views are **marginalised** - pushed to the edges of any debate - through the use of negative legitimating values (such as 'extremist').

Just as, historically, the **Glasgow Media Group** (1976) highlighted how television news manipulated the portrayal of business leaders and trade unionists during strikes in the 1980s, **Hussain** (2002) has shown how ethnic minority groups are frequently targeted in the media as the cause of "social problems".

This type of **scapegoating** has made frequent appearances in the British media - from black muggers in the 1970's, through welfare scroungers in the 1990's to "Muslim / Islamic" terrorists in the 21st century - and the creation of **moral panics** focused around identifiable folk devils serves two purposes:

● they create "hate figures" to divert audience away from "crises in capitalism" (from high levels of unemployment and inflation to increasing social inequality).

● they allow the extension of highly-restrictive *social controls* aimed at "socially problematic groups"- from Anti-Social Behaviour Orders ASBO's at one extreme to Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures (TPIMs) at the other - into the lives of the population as a whole.

The UK popular press: threats to the "British Way of Life?

The roots of this approach can be found in the work of the **Frankfurt School** in the 1930s and the concept of **mass society**, a type of society, according to **Ross** (1995), where 'the masses' have very distinctive characteristics, such as **wide dispersal** across a geographic area. People are not in daily face-to-face contact and this creates a sense of **social isolation**. What interaction there is, through work, for example, is largely **instrumental** and people lack strong social ties binding them together in communities.

Isolation and limited social interaction mean people rarely feel they are part of a functioning social group, community or society - a gap filled by the media. In the recent past this meant old media like newspapers and television. More recently it has additionally come to mean new media, particularly social media sites like Facebook and Twitter. **Ross** suggests the media are used by powerful groups to create a missing "sense of community and culture". People feel as if they are part of an "online community like-minded people" (who they rarely, if ever, meet in real life) and this opens them up to manipulation by powerful groups and organisations.

Manufacturing an artificial sense of community…

A related concept here is **mass culture** - the idea of a culture manufactured by the media that provides the values and beliefs socially isolated individuals can share to create the illusion of a common culture.

Again, while this is not something exclusive to new media, the latter are seen to facilitate the development of *manipulated communities*; people who, for whatever reason, find themselves socially isolated and easily lead.

Instrumental Marxists see the kinds of cultural and subcultural groupings that coalesce around social media, for example, as inauthentic communities. It is not merely a synthetic, artificial form of culture - one not being created by the people who consume it - it is also artfully manufactured and mass produced.

In this way, cultural commodities such as news, **Fiske** (1995) argues:

"are produced and distributed by an industrialized system whose aim is to maximize profit by appealing to as many consumers as possible".

To appeal to 'the masses', therefore, cultural products - from news through films to video games - have to be safe, not intellectually demanding and predictable.

Mass culture is significant because of its control by a *ruling elite* through the media; if powerful groups control the culture of the masses they are can manipulate cultural norms and values to their own continued advantage.

Neo-Marxism

As we've seen, cultural **hegemony** is a key concept for this approach and the media's **hegemonic role** is considered in terms of how it acts to create and sustain a broad political consensus around a set of **core** or 'fundamental' values. These reflect t*aken for granted beliefs* about a society that set the agenda for debate.

Anything that *threatens* these values - from social inequality to alternatives to capitalism - is either not reported, actively criticised and marginalised.

Anything *outside* these core values, from sexual deviance to the effect of video games, can be discussed and argued over - which allows the media to reflect a variety of opinions while absorbing critical views that may threaten the stability of the system.

The ideological role of the media is *not* one of providing a 'common culture for the masses' - *mass society* is seen as an over-simplified concept - but rather one of *maintaining the broad status quo* by protecting and enhancing core values. This hegemonic approach solves the problem for a bourgeois (ruling) class of how to win control over how people think and behave in a way that encourages them to contribute to their own (ultimately economic) exploitation.

Neo-Marxist approaches, therefore, involve a **reflexive** approach to understanding the role of the media; they examine how the structure of capitalist societies both *conditions* how an audience sees and interprets the world and is in turn *conditioned by* audience behaviour. A core value of capitalist society, for example, is the pursuit of individual private profit and the role of the **state** is to act in ways that protect and enhance this value; from enshrining it in law to acting in ways that limit the development of monopolies and encourage competition.

Media **owners**, for their part, as **Follett** (2012) notes, have a *fiduciary* (legal and ethical) duty to their shareholders to pursue profits and this, in turn, places a range of practical and ideological constraints on the behaviour of media **professionals**, from editors to journalists; from the selection of stories as "news" (*agenda setting*) to how news content is selected and presented.

While the media is "biased" in the way it constructs news this, as **Philo** and **Berry** (2004) argue, results from how it is organised around a particular capitalist worldview, rather than from covert manipulation by a ruling class. Owners and professionals operate within a particular set of assumptions about the world that, in turn, condition how they carry-out their respective roles.

manufacturing consensus

A key idea here, therefore, is the **manufacture of consensus**. The role of the media is one of manufacturing *a* consensus about core values around which people are socialised. This role is an implicitly ideological one; influencing how people think about society while appearing to do no such thing - a trick achieved in two ways: firstly through **hierarchies of access** and secondly through the manufacture of **trust**.

Traditionally, **access** to the mass media (producing a newspaper, film or television programme) has been *restricted* by things like **cost** and the fact that for your voice to be '**heard**' you have to be employed by a media owner.

The development of **new media** - particularly but not exclusively social media - has made entry, cheaper, easier and more accessible, although restrictions still apply - you need a computer, an Internet connection and so forth - and this is a problem for Instrumental Marxism. This follows because it's much more difficult to see how a new **mediascape** that has much wider access and greater information diversity can be as tightly and instrumentally controlled as this approach claims.

Neo-Marxism avoids this problem through the concept of **trust**. Information (such as news) is not equal; people place different levels of *trust* in information depending on how they perceive its **source**.

Hargreaves and Thomas (2002), for example, found:

● 91% of respondents trusted television news
● 73% trusted newspapers and
● 15% trusted the Internet.

While these levels of trust might have been expected at the turn of the century - the Internet, for example, was still a relatively new and exotic medium - **Kearney** (2017) found much the same distribution of trust across television, newspapers and the Internet nearly 20 years later.

The least and most trusted news sources
Based on proportion of 'trusted' versus 'not trusted' responses
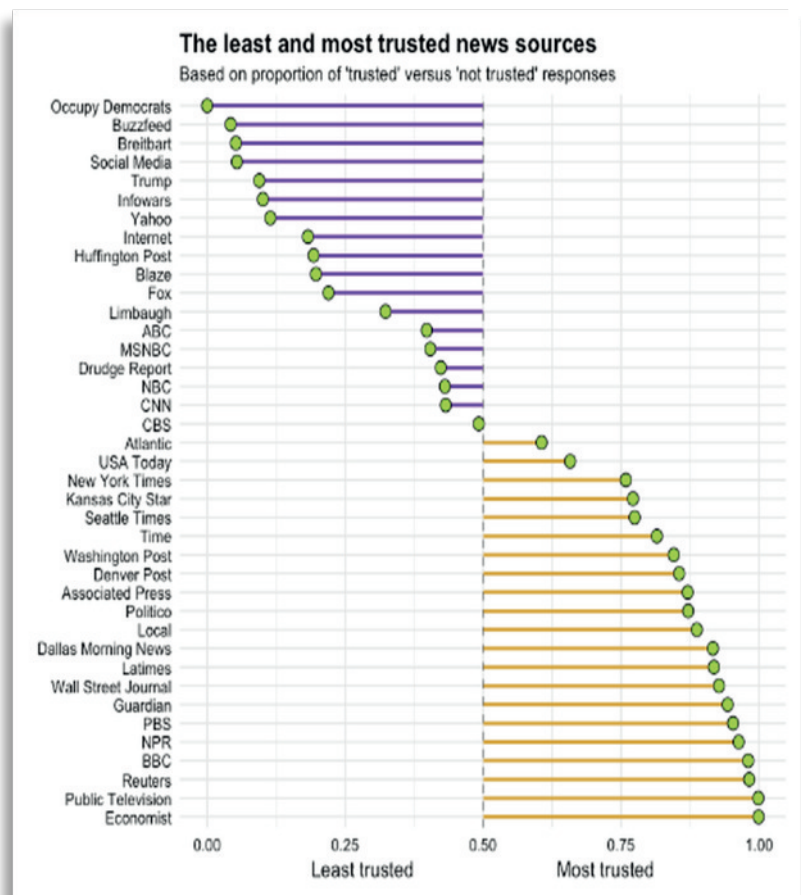
Kearney: Trusting News Project Report (2017)

In other words, old media creates greater levels of *trust* in an audience than new media - and this is hugely significant for the *hegemonic role* of those who own and control such media.

The BBC is consistently cited one of the world's most trusted sources of news.

A further aspect of both **access** and **trust** is that, in general, old media give greater access and prominence to the views of the rich and the powerful.

They are also more likely to be given a platform, such as a newspaper article or a TV programme, that lets them speak *directly* to an audience, rather than have their views reported by a journalist. The voices of the poor and powerless are much less likely to be featured in both old and new media.

The relationship between *hegemony and core values* also overcomes the problem of **media diversity**. The focus on core values means different media can be aimed at different audiences; readers of the *Daily Mail*, for example, don't usually read *The Guardian*. Although these newspapers have very different political values, they arguably share many core economic and political assumptions about the society in which they operate.

Politically and culturally miles apart, but all agree on economic fundamentals

While *pluralists* see the explosion of new media as evidence of media *diversity* - many millions of dissenting voices around the globe that cannot be easily channelled or manipulated - this involves, for neo-Marxists, an **ecological fallacy**; the assumption that the characteristics of the whole are reflected in its individual components.

Thus, while something like blogging is hugely diverse (there are estimated to be around 200 million unique blogs) and has a massive global audience, the problem, as **Logan** (2010) notes, is that "the average number of readers of any given blog is 7".

And while this may be something of a statistical exaggeration (it includes an unknown number of blogs with no readers because they have effectively ceased publication) it suggests that diversity, in itself, is not always a particularly useful measure. Rather, it's the **social context** within which diversity occurs that is significant.

Pluralism

Pluralism is a general name given to a range of approaches that share some fundamental beliefs about the nature of society and the role of the media - one of the most important being **diversity**; even where old media are highly **concentrated**, there exists a range of views on offer and this ideational diversity (relating to ideas and concepts) is even more evident in new media.

The significance of media diversity for this general approach is that it leads to **choice** and, more-specifically, choice focused around audiences. Whereas different forms of Marxism tend to focus on the role of producers in the mass media, pluralists see media consumers as the most important factor in understanding how and why news is constructed.

This follows from the deceptively simple observation that in situations where choice exists the customer is king. If they choose to buy a particular media product it will flourish. If they don't, it won't.

market discipline

The 'discipline of the market place' is a *reflexive process, an idealised version of which involves:*

● owners competing to win audiences,

● creating **innovation** and **diversity** as new and different media products are developed,

● which in turn draws in new audiences…

Owners and controllers, driven by the need to maintain and enhance market share, continually look for ways to improve their product:

● technologically (satellite and cable channels or digital television, for example) and

● qualitatively*,* such as developing new types of programming and presentation.

For Pluralist approaches the *economic imperative* (the requirement to make profits by drawing in customers, subscribers and so forth) gives audiences a pivotal role: as active, knowledgeable and discerning consumers that buy into content that fits their lifestyles or beliefs - while ignoring content that doesn't.

New media increases diversity and choice - there are websites that reflect most shades of political and ideological opinion - and this places media **controllers** in a powerful position through their ability to seek out and respond to audience demand.

From this general perspective the media provides a range of individual and collective benefits to consumers:

- news media, for example, provide **information** services that keep people in touch with political and economic developments and cater for specialist interest groups (such as youth or ethnic minorities).

- media diversity ensures audiences can choose from different sources of information, local, national and increasingly global.

- the media has a **policing** function, whereby the activities of the powerful can be scrutinised, exposed and criticised. **Wintour** (2012), for example, highlights the role played by the media in exposing tax avoidance schemes amongst senior UK government officials.

- a plurality of media, catering for a wide range of ideas, facilitates **freedom of speech** and allows for **public debates** around issues, such as fox-hunting, phone-hacking, membership of the EU and so forth that contribute to democratic discourse.

A key argument for Pluralists is that the media do not create attitudes; rather, **Thomas** (2004) argues, they "reflect and reinforce them"; if British newspapers are broadly conservative, this is because the prevailing attitudes of British consumers is broadly conservative.

New Right

While most Pluralist approaches see the State as playing an **indirect role** in democratic societies that guarantees media diversity and consumer choice **New Right** forms of pluralism are generally antagonistic towards the State playing any role in the functioning of economic markets because they argue government interventions distort the workings of free markets and, by so doing work against the interests of consumers by limiting their choices.

The BBC, for example, is guaranteed funding through a compulsory licence fee and doesn't have to compete with other channels or organisations for viewers and revenue. Its size and funding also means it can potentially stifle **competition** in the markets it enters.

Anything that hinders the working of economic markets is undesirable since, for New Right approaches, only free markets can deliver innovation and economic development.

This applies, for example, to *media convergence* - how different types of media combine to create newer forms, such as streaming television pictures over the Internet. Government regulation limiting cross-media ownership, is seen to prevent companies developing these new technologies.

New Right approaches, in this respect, tend to focus on the problems associated with State-owned media and government interventions, while the anti-competitive behaviour of privately-owned media receives much less attention.

Major new media corporations such as Google and Facebook are just as capable - and more than willing - to stifle the development of potential competitors by simply taking them over.

Facebook, for example, has consistently targeted and bought companies that either compete directly with the services it offers or which complement and extend those services. In recent years, for example, Facebook has acquired:

- Instagram, the photo and video sharing platform, and

- Whatsap - a messaging service that was a direct competitor to Facebook messenger

WhatsAp was such a successful competitor in the personal messaging sector that Facebook decided to buy it rather than compete with it…

- LiveRail - a video advertising technology company and

- Oculus Rift - a major player in emerging virtual reality technology.

It is also arguable that, in the UK at least, successive government attempts to regulate media markets have been designed to *promote*, rather than stifle competition.

The **Cairncross Review** (2019), for example, an "*independent review into the future of high-quality journalism in the UK*", is just the latest attempt to reinforce pluralist notions of competition.

Cairncross Review Recommendations

1. New codes of conduct to rebalance the relationship between online platforms and publishers: Those online platforms upon which publishers increasingly depend for traffic should be required to set out codes of conduct to govern their commercial arrangements with news publishers, with oversight from a regulator.

2. Investigate the workings on the online advertising market to ensure fair competition: The Competition and Markets Authority should use its information-gathering powers to conduct a market study of the online advertising industry.

3. News quality obligation: Online platforms' efforts to improve users' news experience should be placed under regulatory supervision. Platforms have already developed initiatives to help users identify reliability and the trustworthiness of sources.

4. Media literacy: The government should develop a media literacy strategy, working with Ofcom, the online platforms, news publishers, broadcasters, voluntary organisations and academics, to identify gaps in provision and opportunities for more collaborative working.

5. The BBC's market impact and role: Ofcom should assess whether BBC News Online is striking the right balance between aiming for the widest reach for its own content on the one hand and driving traffic from its online site to commercial publishers (particularly local ones) on the other. The BBC should do more to share its technical and digital expertise for the benefit of local publishers.

6. Innovation funding: The government should launch a new fund focussed on innovations aimed at improving the supply of public-interest news, to be run by Nesta in the first instance, and in due course by the proposed Institute for Public Interest News.

7. New forms of tax relief: The government should introduce new tax reliefs aimed at (i) improving how the online news market works and (ii) ensuring an adequate supply of public-interest journalism.

8. Direct funding for local public-interest news: The Local Democracy Reporting Service should be evaluated and expanded, and responsibility for its management passed to, or shared with, the proposed Institute for Public Interest News.

9. Establish an Institute for Public Interest News: A dedicated body could amplify existing and future efforts to ensure the sustainability of public-interest news, working in partnership with news publishers and the online platforms as well as bodies such as Nesta, Ofcom, the BBC and academic institutions.

Postmodernism

This approach reflects a *broadly pluralist perspective* in that it questions Marxist arguments about the media's ideological role. In a world that, to use **McCluhan**'s (1992) phrase, increasingly resembles a *global village*, the media can no-longer be subject to the kinds of controls, checks and balances that historically once restricted the free flow of ideas and information.

Whereas Marxist approaches view information as flowing hierarchically*,* from producers to consumers, postmodernists see information in terms of **networks**; power*,* in terms of control over the production and distribution of news, is no longer concentrated within institutions (such as media companies) but within social networks where information is both produced and consumed by the same people. Information flows between different points (people) within a network in such a way as to make it impossible to distinguish between producer and consumer.

Tuomi (2002), for example, identifies the characteristic features of *postmodern media* in terms of three ideas:

- **Consumer as producer:** they are increasingly the same person.

- **Backstage is Frontstage**: While **Goffman** (1959) classically argued that in our everyday, face-to-face, interactions, our "backstage" is where we privately rehearse the "frontstage performance" we plan to give when we present ourselves to others. With something like a social media site all social interaction is played out within the confines of the medium and the face we present to the world is increasingly the unvarnished, unmediated, person we are.

On social media, Frontstage is Backstage…

- **Content reflects interpretation**: How different people in the network interpret information contributes to its development. Media content, in other words, is interpreted differently by differently-positioned individuals (such as males and females, young and old) and these differences reflect back on content. Owners and controllers can't influence how particular forms of content will be seen or interpreted by an audience.

In postmodernity the media are seen to operate in a world where, **Sarup** (1989) argues, knowledge has become:

"*fragmented, partial and contingent*".

Knowledge in postmodernity is increasingly held to be relative to, or dependent on, your particular viewpoint rather than the statement of some sort of essential empirical truth. It reflects a world in which, as **Milovanovic** (1997) argues:

'*there are many truths and no over-encompassing Truth is possible*'.

A significant role of the media in postmodernity, therefore, is one of giving form and apparent solidity to a world in flux: where what we knew to be true yesterday will no-longer be true tomorrow - unless and until the media says it is.

In such a situation - presupposing we're inclined to accept it reflects a certain reality - the construction of news is necessarily, *by definition*, *ideological*. In a world of contingent truth it cannot be otherwise.

In relation to something like news, for example, we experience *mediated realities* (realities that are almost entirely created by the media) whereby information is organised in terms of **discourses** - what **Fiske** (1987) defines as a system of representation, developed to circulate ideas, beliefs and values about something, that creates a framework for its interpretation by an audience.

Part of the function of a *news discourse*, for example, is to define the concept of news itself and once this occurs, further refinements take place. This includes the ability to define meanings for an audience through a range of *narratives* or *stories* that indicate to audiences how they are supposed to interpret news events (as good or bad, man-made or natural, accidental or deliberate, important or unimportant and so on) that **determines** their response to whatever is being presented as news. How it is selected and presented, in other words, influences how it is perceived.

In this situation the media propagate, control, organise, criticise, promote and demote (marginalise) a variety of *competing narratives* that only become important in the context of *power* and the ability to represent the interests of powerful voices in society.

In our society for example, crime news is generally presented in terms of a "*danger discourse*", one that characterises crime as "a social problem" that reaches into and affects all levels of society at all times. Supporting narratives may involve selecting unusual and atypical crimes and presenting them as usual and typical or focusing on specific forms of criminal behaviour, such as interpersonal violence, that lend support to the overall narrative.

Again in our society, mediated crime narratives generally solidify around the "crimes of the powerless" (relatively common but trivial forms of criminal behaviour involving relatively minor harms) while generally ignoring the crimes of the powerful.

changing perceptions

The question here is not whether news discourses are 'true or false', nor whether they 'accurately or inaccurately' reflect the 'reality of crime' (or whatever behaviour is being presented and represented); rather, it's how they affect our **perception** of that behaviour - and this has significant ramifications for how we understand and explain the role of the media.

In particular, it rejects both traditional and neo-Marxist arguments that we can, at some level, discern a *social reality that is real*, as distinct from *media manufactured realities* that serve to obscure exploitative (class) relationships. **Baudrillard** (1995), for example, illustrates this idea through the concepts of:

● Simulacra or "representations that refer to other representations". What we call "news", for example, is nothing more than a *simulacrum* - a "*copy without an original*" - and this involves the related concept of:

● **Hyperreality** - something that is "more real than the thing it purports to represent". Through the act of selecting and reporting something

"*as news*" for example, journalists (or whoever) effectively construct the thing that purports to be something real and original. However, since an audience only knows "the reality of an event" through how it is reported it's impossible to separate "the real from the representation"; the real *is* the representation.

These ideas are hugely important when considering the significance of media ownership and control in contemporary societies because if we accept this argument it follows that in postmodernity "*representations are the only reality*" and those who have the power to create and perpetuate their representation of reality will necessarily be hugely influential.

While modernist approaches like Marxism and, to some extent, traditional forms of Pluralism such as those represented by the New Right, consider representations in terms of how and why they *misrepresent* particular groups, **Baudrillard** argues representations can't be assessed in terms of whether something is accurately or inaccurately represented because how something is represented *is* its reality.

Modernist approaches suggest the media represents something like "ethnicity" in ways that distort its reality; "*the real*" is compared to its media representation in order to disentangle it from the "*not real*". If you've ever spent any time on social media platforms like Twitter or Facebook you will probably find this technique familiar - people arguing about which representation of reality (their's or those they are arguing with, is real).

Baudrillard, however, suggests this approach is mistaken on two levels:

1. It assumes things in the social world have a reality outside of how they are represented. In the physical world, for example, we can look at something like the original, authentic, Buckingham Palace and compare it with the various ways it has been represented through *inauthentic copies* (such as the "Buckingham Palace Care Home" or any other inauthentic copy you care to devise).

A representation of the real Buckingham Palace. Which, when you think about, is actually ironic…

Concepts like "news", 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. That which we call "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.

In relation to ownership and control, therefore, the ability to "*control representations*" through the power to shape a discourse and the narratives it contains is hugely important, as can be exampled in relation to something like crime news. While crime has no single, overriding, reality, it is frequently explained in terms of different, often contradictory, media discourses that exist in the same social (hyper) space:

● **Domination discourses** involve the media mapping out its role as part of the overall 'locus of social control', where the 'media machine' is tightly integrated into society's overall mechanisms of formal and informal social control. This involves calling for new, tougher punishments and criticising 'soft on crime, soft on the causes of crime' approaches.

This discourse weaves a variety of narratives drawing on traditional punishments, such as prisons and newer forms of technological surveillance, such as CCTV, to create a discourse that locates 'criminals' and 'non-criminals' in different physical and moral universes.

● **Democratic discourses** involve the media acting as a **watchdog** on the activities of the powerful; exposing political and economic corruption or as a focal point for oppositional ideas.

● **Danger discourses** involve narratives of **fear** - crime is reported in terms of threat - and **fascination**; crime as a 'media staple' used to sell newspapers, encourage us to watch TV programmes (factual and fictional), and so forth.

These two narratives come together, **Kidd-Hewitt and Osborne** (1995) argue, in terms of crime as **postmodern** s**pectacle** – crime is news because of the powerful combination of fear and fascination (such as the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center (*sic*) in 2001).

"Spectacles" are an integral part of the crime discourse in postmodern society, constructed as both news *and* entertainment - an example of **intertextuality** where 'reality' and 'fiction' are interwoven to construct a seamless web of 'fear and fascination', such that the viewer is no longer sure whether what they are seeing is real or reconstruction.

Media Representations of Social Groups

This set of a-level sociology notes examines how a range of social groups are represented in the media, in terms of their *form* (**class**, **age**, **gender** and **ethnicity**) and *function*, considered from different theoretical perspectives.

Representations

This section examines the way social groups are represented in the media, in terms of their form, based on categories of **class**, **age**, **gender** and **ethnicity** and function, considered from different theoretical perspectives.

Before we look at explanations for how and why the media represents different groups in different ways, we can start by identifying two useful concepts:

- **Stereotypes** are one-sided accentuations of a characteristic or set of characteristics (real or imagined) that are supposedly indicative of a total group. Gender stereotypes commonly used in the media, for example, involve routinely assigning men and women different characteristics based on their biological sex - men, for example, portrayed as cool, calm and rational, women as emotional and the like. One important thing about media stereotypes is how they can be used as master statuses: the stereotypical characteristic is used to define everything about an individual or group.

- **Tropes**, while similar to stereotypes, are commonly used, repeated themes or devices within which different groups are located. A common TV trope, for example, is that working-class women are invariably single parents who are victims of an abusive and largely-absent male partner. The elderly, on the other hand, almost invariably suffer from some form of dementia. Media tropes are, in this respect, cliched representations of social groups.

Media tropes:
The working class all live on run-down council estates.

Social Class

While these Notes are mainly focused on explanations for representations it's useful to identify some examples of how different social groups are represented through the media lens. This selection is not, of course, exhaustive, merely indicative. There are many more examples you can bring to bear from your wider reading around the topic.

Although each category is treated separately for theoretical convenience, keep in mind there are always *intersections* of class, age, gender and ethnicity: although classes are represented in different ways there are also differences in representation within them based on categories like age, gender and ethnicity.

Media representations of social class take a range of forms, with different classes **stereotypically** represented in different ways.

Working Class

Working class representation routinely involves a relatively narrow and limited range of **identities**, from the *historical* - popular costume dramas that focus on servitude, poverty and criminality - to the *contemporary* where a similar range of themes are apparent: working class life represented through a range of socially **problematic behaviours**: crime, welfare dependency, unemployment, sexual promiscuity, divorce, divorce and single parenthood (the latter almost exclusively portrayed as female).

While representations rarely portray the *ordinariness* of working class life, recurrent themes, from news reports, through documentaries to entertainment shows, represent the working classes as:

- *violent* (particularly young, single, men).

- *dangerous* to both themselves (through things like drug abuse) and others.

- *problematic* in their behaviour and attitudes (sexism, racism and homophobia, for example, are particular qualities attributed to working class males).

- *workshy*, unemployed and unemployable.

- *dependent* on both the State and, by extension, the tolerance and generosity of the middle and upper classes.

This suggests a range of further representational themes. The working class are, for example:

- *Largely invisible*, both in terms of their actual media presence and in terms of their particular needs or concerns.

- *Voiceless*: While media commentators frequently talk about them, it's relatively rare to actually hear working class voices in the media. Their "voice", in other words, is invariably that of (middle class) commentators.

- *Part of a Human Zoo*: This aspect of working-class representation involves the lives of working-class people being visited and represented through a middle-class lens. The viewer is invited to observe "working-class lives" much as the zoo visitor is invited to observe the animals "in their natural environment". So-called "poverty porn", for example, invites viewers to watch working-class people struggling to cope with their daily lives.

Poverty Porn? "Benefits Street" (Channel 4)

- *Objectified*: We are given, for example, a great deal of factual / statistical information about the working class (form their levels of education through the numbers marrying and divorcing, to levels of poverty) but it's rare for the human elements behind these statistics to be represented in the media.

Further dimensions to this objectification involve the imposition of various attributes, characteristics and failings on this general group - from arguments that poverty is a consequence of "poor life choices" to the romanticising of working class life (its *Downton Abbeyification*).

Downton Abbeyfication: Poor But Happy?

Overall, these ideas are reflected in the concept of **ghettoisation**: the idea working class representation is generally restricted to a narrow range of situations, attitudes and behaviours. While much of working class representation is generally negative - focused on both the qualities they supposedly *lack* (initiative, motivation and so forth) and those they supposedly *personify* (unthinking aggression, unintelligence and so forth), one **positive** area of working class representation is sport, particularly male professional sport.

Middle Class

Middle-class representation tends to be broader, ranging across professional employment and cultural associations such as music, fashion and art - representations that help to cement class associations with culture:

While lower class **popular culture** is represented as manufactured, artificial, superficial, disposable, undemanding and culturally valueless, **high culture**, associated with middle and upper class life, is the opposite; difficult, demanding, deep, long-lasting and culturally valuable.

Where working-class lives and experiences are largely *marginalised* - the working classes have less direct access to the media than their middle class peers and less control over how they are portrayed - middle and upper class lives are *emphasised*.

The middle classes, for example, are generally represented *positively* and *activity*; not only are they in control of their own lives, these lives are central to the economic, political and cultural well-being of the Nation.

While working class lives are marginalised by their **invisibility** as both historical and contemporary actors - dramas and documentaries, for example, largely erase their lives and contributions to historical movements - middle and upper class lives take centre stage. British history, for example, is largely represented through the thoughts and actions of royalty and the aristocracy.

Contemporary forms of invisibility exclude working class life by focusing on the interests, actions and activities of business leaders, middle and upper class politicians, philanthropists and the like.

The meaning of working class life?
Ask An Expert

Where the working classes feature in accounts of social and economic development they are more likely, as **Ehrenreich** (1989) observes, to be cast as beneficiaries of middle class help and advice or as subjects for discussion by middle class "experts". While working class identities are overly-represented by **vices**, middle class identities are shaped by **virtues:** their resourcefulness, productivity, culturation and "helpfulness" - particularly in relation to the "less fortunate" objects of such help: from telling the working class how to discipline children properly, to how to find work.

Supernanny:
Solving all your (working class) parenting problems…

While middle class lives are focused around power and control, working class lives are the *subject* of such power and control - a general representation that casts the working class as dysfunctional, dependent and a social problem, while middle and upper class lives are the mirror-opposite: functional, independent (particularly of State aid) and a social solution.

This aspect of class representation ranges from middle and upper class lives being held-up as *ideals* to which all should aspire to the idea that if the working classes followed middle class advice and behaviour their "problems" would be solved.

A further feature of stereotypical class representations is their **aggregation** and **individualisation**.

Stereotypes of working class life are *aggregated*, in the sense of being applied almost indiscriminately to this class as a whole. **Ehrenreich**, for example, argues the working classes are portrayed as inarticulate, old-fashioned, uneducated, feckless and incapable - representations, she suggests, that serve to silence their voices; they are "dumb", both literally and metaphorically. This type of representation frequently sees social classes in terms of their binary oppositions - what one class is, the other is not.

The Binary Oppositions of Class	
Upper class	**Working class**
rich	poor
have	have-not
privileged	needy
hardworking	lazy
intelligent	ignorant
empowered	disempowered
clean	dirty
worthy	unworthy
financially independent	welfare dependent
powerful	Powerless

These oppositional aggregations generally portray higher social classes in a more-positive light, focusing on their virtues *as a class*. Where higher class behaviour is seen as problematic - in terms of things like greed, selfishness or criminality - it is more likely to be *individualised*: dismissed as the outcome of *individual human weaknesses* rather than symbolic of the failings of a whole class. The 2008 banking crisis that destabilised the global economic system, for example, has been individualised by the media in terms of the actions of a few "rogue individuals and institutions" rather than as indicative of a fundamental social problem of unregulated financial capitalism.

Age

Youth

While the idea that mass media are controlled by adults isn't exactly a stunning revelation, these aren't, to coin a phrase, "just any old adults".

In the UK, as in countries like the USA, these adults are mainly middle-aged, middle-class, milky-white and male - and this means that representations of young people aren't just constructed through an **"adult gaze"** (how adults see and represent youth). Rather, they're constructed through a particular and very powerful sub-section of adulthood.

How this power is used, however, varies across time and space; contemporary Western societies, for example, tend to demonstrate levels of **ambivalence** about children and young people.

- On the one hand children may be represented in terms of their '*innocent and uncorrupted nature*'. They are, in this respect, requiring of adult supervision and help.

- On the other they may be represented as unruly, lacking self-control and requiring adult discipline and guidance.

The changing face of youth: from simply Spectacular to plain Ordinary?

Both forms of representation frequently feature in relation to young people and new technologies (from cinema, through television to computers).

In relation to the Internet, for example, representations of innocence combined with (adult) technological fears produce a powerful - if in reality very rare - perception of children as victims of sexual predators that serves as an arena for the development of *folk devils* and *moral panics*. **Pearson** (1983), for example, argues moral panics focused around the behaviour of young people have been a persistent feature of media representations over the past 150 years.

Youth is frequently represented as being a **problematic** life-stage on both an individual and group level:

- Individually youth is frequently represented in terms of traits like rebellion, disrespect, selfishness and obsessions with Self and sex (often at the same time).

- As a group, collective representations frequently portray youth in terms of traits such as delinquency, politically apathy, immaturity, over-sexualisation and a lack of self-control.

Representations also have a tendency towards ambivalence in the sense of changing to reflect both changing social *mores* and youth as a fragmented social category. As with representations of class, however, there's clear evidence of different forms of class and gender representation. Media portrayals of young working class males tend, for example, to the portrayal of young middle class females.

A particularly dominant form of representation over the past 40 or so years has been the distinction between **normal** and **abnormal** youth, with the former being defined in opposition to various **spectacular youth subcultures** (Mods and Rockers, Skinheads, Hippies and Punks blazed a short but very bright trail across the media skyline).

There has however, been a noticeably lower lack of media interest in the activities of "*extraordinary youth*" over the past 15 - 20 years, for a couple of possible reasons:

On the one hand there's the argument of a general lack of distinctiveness among contemporary youth cultures. There's nothing, in other words, that particularly stands-out about contemporary youth groupings that interests the media: they're not, for example, engaged in behaviour that, in media terms, is particularly outrageous or newsworthy.

On the other is the related idea that "youth" has become a such a *fragmented social category* in late modern societies that no single *homogenous* group (such as Punks or Skinheads) ever comes to the attention of the media.

In terms of the latter argument, **Waiton** (2008) suggests the rigid moral order that once periodically gave rise to oppositional youth subcultures (from *Mods* to *Hippies* to *Punks*) has, in late modernity, fragmented to such an extent that there is little or nothing of any moral substance against which to rebel.

More recent representations have, in this respect, tended to focus less on the behaviour and attitudes of "rebellious youth" and more on celebrations of youth, particularly in terms of young people as a vibrant source of social change - particularly, but not exclusively, *political change* in relation to things like concerns about the environmental and the like.

There has also been a noticeable change of media emphasis surrounding the *desirability of youth*, albeit expressed in rather abstract terms: youth, in the sense of being *young*, being seen by older adults as a highly-desirable *physical*, if not necessarily mental state.

However we see youth represented through various media, it's evident that while most young people, like their adult counterparts, are irredeemably *ordinary,* their representation in various forms of media - from newspapers, through television to social media - tends to be far removed from that simple condition.

The elderly

At the opposite end of the age scale, the elderly, in common with their younger counterparts, have traditionally been represented in a narrow range of roles, with a particular emphasis on *social problems*.

Their **problematic status** has recently, for example, been reconstructed around how the burden of an *ageing population* impacts on the rest of society through the increasing costs of state pensions, hospital treatment and social care. Individually, their representation has also been largely unsympathetic, constructed around images of senility, illness, both mental and physical, unattractiveness and so forth.

The Grey Pound:
how are representations linked to affluence?

Historically, for example, **Willis** (1999), notes '*older people were often crudely stereotyped in drama, with half of fictional portrayals showing them as grumpy, interfering, lonely, stubborn and not interested in sex. Older women are often seen as "silly", older men as miserable gits*'.

Although these images still have currency in some parts of media, the changing nature of representation is reflected, in areas like television, in more sympathetic portrayals that mirror, in part, the changing nature of media audiences; the elderly, for example, are the heaviest viewers of television and they increasingly demand programming that reflects their interests - and, in terms of advertising, their spending power.

Their **invisibility** in areas like popular drama and film has also changed in response to wider social changes. There are now more elderly people as a percentage of the overall population and **Weaver** (2008) reports that:

"*By 2032, those aged over 65 are projected to make up almost a quarter of the UK population*".

Loose Women, ITV's popular panel show,
passed 3,000 episodes in 2018

Changing representations of older women are particularly apparent; this group, traditionally represented as objects of pity, charity, social work and the medical profession are increasingly represented as fashionable, active and *sexual* beings.

While numbers alone don't guarantee positive representations, two further reasons make this more common.

Firstly, the elderly are an increasingly affluent population segment; the **Institute for Fiscal Studies** (2006) estimate around 80% of wealth in Britain is held by those aged 50+ and the 'Grey Pound' is attractive to the advertisers who fund large areas of the British media.

Secondly, television as an important mass medium is a relatively new phenomenon in our society 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.

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 have started to show a greater gender convergence.

Physical representations of **bodies**, in terms of shape for example, while traditionally focused on women are increasingly relevant to men and these representations are important in two main ways:

● how they've changed - the greater frequency with which sexualised *male bodies,* the 'sixpack' for example, are represented as sexually desirable for women and culturally desirable for men

● how they've stayed the same: female bodies are still used to sell everything from cars to camping equipment and men are still allowed a greater range of body shapes.

These representations reflect broader assumptions about male and female behaviour - that women should be cooperative and submissive while dominant females are often represented as figures of fun or (deviant) sexuality.
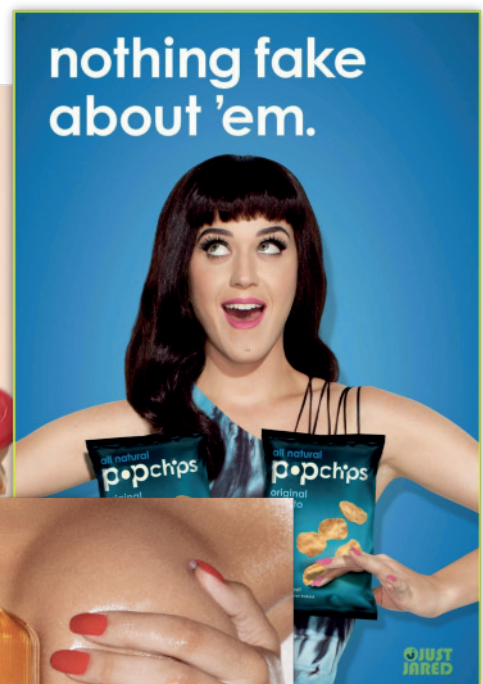
Body representation forms part of a wider set of ideas about beauty, attractiveness and how women, in particular, should look and behave - especially through unstated assumptions that female beauty is both *heterosexual* and largely for the benefit of what **Mulvey** (1975) calls the **male gaze** - female bodies viewed and judged through the lens of male desires.

In terms of emotions, **Macdonald** (2003) identifies gender differences in magazine adverts for alcohol, where traditional gender differences emerge through associations with different types of drink.

● Adverts aimed at men, for example, show a restricted range of 'allowed' drinks (mainly beer and spirits) and also maintain a 'harder', more individualistic, image of masculinity.

● Adverts aimed at women emphasise a 'softer', more social, aspect to drinking - bringing people together, easing tensions - as well as allowing women a greater range of alcoholic options.

"1957 called and asked for the return of its childish and demeaning female stereotypes"

Macdonald noted, however, a particular category of female ('ladettes') challenges these stereotypes and breaks down gender barriers through representations that emphasised the ability of women to behave in the same kind of way as their male counterparts (drinking pints, 'behaving badly').

This suggests representations of gender are "*not static and woman are permitted to take on certain masculine behaviours in certain situations*". Such "abnormal representations" may, however, simply prove the general rule.

Unfortunately not all advertisers got the message…

Female **sexuality**, for example, is routinely used to sell consumer goods, employing an exaggerated form of (hetero) sexuality that combines the physical - thin, large-breasted - and the emotional, such as **patriarchal** notions of 'availability'.

Representations of "normal" and "abnormal" **sexuality** are a recurring feature of tabloid newspapers, with "normal" invariably defined as *heterosexual (heteronormativity).*

Male homosexuality has been linked in the British tabloid press to both paedophilia and AIDS - *The Sun*, for example, describing it as a 'Gay Plague'.

McLean (2002) however, argues the nature of tabloid *homophobia* has changed in the face of changing public attitudes:

"The Sun that once printed '10 Ways to Spot a Gay Priest' and allowed a columnist to call gay people 'poofters' now recognises that much coveted younger readers will not tolerate the knee-jerk bigotry that previously passed for balanced coverage".

The general argument here is that contemporary representations of men and women, masculinity and femininity, have moved away from the kind of crude, traditional, stereotypes that were commonplace in the 1950's onwards - although these still exist - towards representations that confront, challenge, mock and break down stereotypical representations. The reasons for this change are partly:

- economic: greater female financial independence means women are increasingly seen as individuals in their own right rather than as appendages of men.

- political: all forms of discrimination are increasingly unacceptable in our society.

- cultural: both gender and media are no-longer simple homogeneous categories.

Gender, for example, is both more **fluid** - people define their gender identity in a range of ways even within the relatively restricted biological categories of "male" and female" - and **fragmented**.

Unlike in even the relatively recent past, where gender identities were arguably *centred* around a narrow range of gendered attributes, identities have become much more *decentred* - there is, for example, no single way to be "masculine" or "feminine".

The media has also become more fragmented across old and new forms and **Gauntlett** (2002) argues there are increasingly positive aspects to media representations of gender.

He suggests, for example, the media is "*within limits, a force for change*": traditional stereotypical representations of women, for example, 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*'.

One of the key ideas to recognise here is that, as with related representations of class, age and ethnic there have been major changes over the past 50 or so years around how and why the media represents men and women in different ways. While it's arguable as to whether these changes have resulted from wider social changes that then impact on media representations or from changing media representations that then filter through into wider society, changing forms of male and female representation are relatively clear.

As a case in point to illustrate this idea, the UK **Advertising Standards Authority** signposted a new code of conduct, to be introduced in 2019. As **The Guardian** (2018) reported:

"*British companies will no longer be able to create promotions that depict men and women engaged in gender-stereotypical activities, amid fears that such depictions are contributing to pay inequality and causing psychological harm*".

Examples of the banned forms of representation include:

- **Sexist stereotypes** such as "showing a woman struggling to park a car or a man refusing to do housework while his wife cooks dinner". This will also include advertising that belittles men "for carrying out stereotypically "female" roles or tasks" and "adverts that emphasise the contrast between a boy's stereotypical personality and a girl's".

- **Sex-specific disabilities**, such as someone "failing to achieve a task specifically because of their gender" (a man unable to change a nappy or a woman unable to do DIY, for example).

- **Body transformations** that suggest such changes will make someone romantically successful, happier and the like.

- The **sexualisation** of young women.

Despite such changes, the **Media Literacy Council** (2018) noted a range of *common gender stereotypes* still persist in male and female media representations:

While **women**, for example, are much less likely to be not subjected to the crude forms of gender stereotyping that was common in the past, they remain overwhelmingly represented in ways that **"**prioritise the importance of beauty over brains". While contemporary media representations may be more-subtle, they nevertheless fall into four main categories:

1. Body shape: praising women for being thin and fashionable while criticising ("body shaming") those who, for whatever reason, do not conform to relatively narrow ideas about beauty and style.

2. Objectification: treating women and girls as sexual objects who mainly exist for the gratification of men.

3. Domesticity: suggesting that while some women can "have it all" (a contented family and work life), for most women their primary roles are caregivers and homemakers.

4. Emotional, where women are represented as overly-dramatic, bitchy and prone to be over-emotional.

While, as with their female counterpart, **male** representations have *always* featured in different media (print, film, television and, more-recently, the Internet) these representations have tended to be more-subtle and nuanced, even where they fall into the categories noted above:

1. Body shape: although men have traditionally been allowed a much wider range of body shapes recent forms of representation have started to emphasise idealised - and unobtainable save for a dedicated few - male forms based around the "toned body" stereotype.

2. Domesticity: where women are most-often represented in the home, men are afforded much more freedom in terms of a life - particularly work and leisure - outside the home. Working men also tend to be represented in terms of their power, status and ability.

3. Emotional: media representations of men tend to emphasise "masculine" qualities of mental and physical toughness, grit and so forth as admirable emotions. Any display of "feminine" emotions is generally seen as weakness in man - although there are exceptions that prove the rule. Gay men, for example, are allowed to openly exhibit "feminine emotions" but this, again, is just another feature of how the media construct representations of homosexual and heterosexual masculinity. A further aspect of emotional representation is a tendency for the media to value "bad boys" - those who, for example, engage in various forms of risky behaviour (even where individual risk-taking may endanger others).

Nestle's "It's Not For Girls" chocolate bar advert ran for around 10 years between 2002 and 2012.

Ethnicity

One noticeable feature of ethnic representation in mainstream UK media is the gradual disappearance of what might be termed crude forms of stereotypical and demeaning representations of 'black people' (there was rarely, in the past, much media differentiation of black and Asian ethnic minorities).

No television channel, for example, could screen what were, 40 years ago, hugely popular sitcoms like Love Thy Neighbour where black characters were routinely described by their white counterparts as "*sambos*", "*nignogs*" and "darkies".

To less than hilarious effect.

Love Thy Neighbour (ITV: 1972 - 1976)

For **Malik** (2002), the "comedies about race" that started to appear around this time on British television involved underlying themes of (white) social dislocation and "blackness" being synonymous with "trouble" or "disruption", albeit themes played-out in the relatively unthreatening arena of situation comedy.

Another notable popular comedy of this era, "Mind Your Language" (1977 - 1979) was set in an EFL Adult Education class. This drew on a much wider range of national stereotypes, from White European (Spanish, Italian, German…) to Indian, Pakistani, Chinese and Japanese ethnicities and led **Malik** (2002) wryly note, "*never before had so many diverse races been seen in the same television frame, and never had they clung so tightly to their popular crude national stereotypes*".

At the height of its popularly the programme attracted 18 million UK viewers.

A further example of the type of programming that would now be considered far too racially offensive to be broadcast is the Black and White Minstrel Show. The basic premise of the once hugely popular "variety show" involved white male singers "blacking up" to perform American minstrel, country and show tunes, accompanied by white female dancers. The show ran on primetime UK television for 20 years between 1958 and 1978. A version of the show did, however, run for a further 10 years on the London stage.

The Black and White Minstrel Show (BBC: 1958 - 1978)

While it's clear the cruder forms of ethnic representation that were once seen as broadly acceptable to a mass audience, at least as far as television was concerned, are no-longer tolerated, sociologists such as Hall (1995) and Gilroy (1990) laid the ground for the argument that far from disappearing, racist media representations of ethnicity have changed.

Hall, for example, argued that the crude racial stereotypes that once dominated the media were essentially based on notions of biological / genetic inferiority and superiority. Once these were successfully challenged, the underlying social forces that gave rise to discriminary representations simply found a different outlet - what he termed *inferential racism.*

Whereas in the past black ethnicities were represented in ways that stressed their *biological difference and inferiority*, many contemporary representations, **Gilroy** argued, involved a "*new racism*": one where black ethnicities are represented in ways that stress their subtle *cultural, as opposed to crude biological, difference* (and, by extension, inferiority).

While this subtle development has involved a range of representational continuities - the "funny foreigner" trope so beloved of traditional forms of media, from newspapers to TV sitcoms, remains a staple of ethic representation - some forms of ethnic representation have taken a much darker turn in a post-9/11 world.

Across various forms of old and new media, for example, hugely diverse and complex ethnicities have come to be defined almost exclusively in terms of a single (religious) dimension: that of "Islam" (with all its attendant connotations.

Yarde (2001), argues this 'discourse of threat' has its origins in the large-scale black immigration in the 1950's and that "Since September 11, the stereotypes have become interwoven and confused" leading to the mass media stereotyping of whole ethnic groups as deviant and dangerous.

While the media is frequently criticised for its *under-representation* of ethnic minorities - **Sweney** (2011) reports "*Actors from black, Asian or other ethnic minorities appeared in just 5% of UK TV ads*" and the producer of the popular crime drama "Midsomer Murders" (2011) justified the almost-exclusively white representation of village life as "*a bastion of Englishness*" (the implication being that an English identity was synonomous with being White) - *over-representation* in certain areas like news and fiction can also be problematic.

News reporting of Africa, for example, frequently represents black ethnicities as victims of 'natural disasters' such as floods and famines and perpetrators of man-made disasters involving wars and corrupt regimes.

Content analysis of media reporting of "terrorist incidents" by **Signal Media** (2019), for example, also notes a general reluctance to label "white murderers terrorists":

"*Why, instead, are these killers humanised and we, the reader, encouraged to feel for or relate to them? Both in terms of the language used, and the quantity of coverage, media treatment of differing forms of extremism is skewed. A Muslim can be expected to be immediately labelled a terrorist, whilst the media is hesitant to apply this term to white people*".

Humanising the white Texan serial bomber, Mark Conditt, responsible for 5 explosions that killed 2 and injured 4.

With notable exceptions, such as comedy programmes like *Goodness Gracious Me* (an all-Asian cast) and black actors like Idris Elba taking leading roles in prime-time UK drama, ethnic minorities are predominantly viewed through a **white** (middle class and male) **gaze** - one that, in terms of news reporting, frequently represents whites as saviours, through things like government and public aid.

Top British Soap Coronation Street, first aired in 1960, introduced it's first black family in 2019.

Carrington (2002) used the term *hyperblackness* to suggest how apparently *positive black identities* are invariably constructed around a narrow range of cultural spaces like sport, fashion and music. Hyperblackness, in these contexts, involves representations that promote stereotypes of black bodies solely in terms of 'athleticism and animalism' - the idea these features of black excellence are somehow 'natural' or innate.

A further feature of the white gaze is the representation of ethnic minorities in terms of **Otherness**: how 'They' are different from 'Us'. Ethnic representations are constructed in terms of *cultural difference* as the *cause* of social problems, something **Gilroy** (1990) called a **cultural** (*new*) **racism** focused on cultural differences in language, religion and family life (as opposed to discredited "biological" notions of race, characteristic of "old racism"). A further strand of *Otherness* is ethnic minorities represented in terms of threat:

- a **cultural threat** - challenging a 'British' (*white*) way of life through practices such as arranged and forced marriages or, more recently, the notion of Sharia Law (a legal system based on Islamic religious principles).

- a **physical threat**, in terms of terrorism and criminality. This theme has something of a historical continuity - from **Hall et al** (1978) noting **moral panics** about 'black muggers' in the 1970s, through the claim by the Metropolitan Police (2002) that mugging in London was 'predominantly a black crime', to more-recent associations between "Islam" and "terrorism".

Theoretical Explanations

Marxism

For **Traditional / Instrumental Marxism**, *economic power* is a key variable; those who own the means of physical production are always the most powerful class. Economic power also brings with it the ownership of **mental production**: in this instance, control over how different social groups are represented.

Cultural institutions such as the media are part of the ideological **superstructure** and their role is to support the *status quo* through the creation and maintenance of a w*orldview* that favours the political, ideological and, above all, economic interests of a ruling class. How different social groups are represented within this worldview is a crucial aspect of ruling class domination and control - with the focus of explanation being the various ways a ruling class use their economic dominance to represent less powerful groups in ways that enhance and justify their right to power.

While media representations are not *in themselves* a means of controlling behaviour, they are *a means to an end*.

By representing different groups in particular ways the media allows a ruling class to act against such groups if and whenever their political, ideological or economic power is questioned or threatened.

The specific ability of the media to perform their ideological role is explained in terms of the *interlocking cultural backgrounds* and relationships between journalists, editors, owners and wider capitalist elites. **Kendall** (2011), for example, notes:

"*The complex relationship between privileged people and the paid journalists who work on the political, business and philanthropy beats that cover elite activities - for journalists to gain privileged access to elite inner circles they must be careful about what and how they write about the wealthy and powerful members of their communities*".

More specifically, representations take two main forms:

1. Those designed to divide potential opposition to capitalism.

2. Those that **scapegoat** social groups as a diversion from problems experienced under capitalism.

In terms of explaining different types of representation, the focus tends to be on *class*, mainly because this relates directly to economic interests. Representations here reflect a range of themes:

● from those that directly support and enhance capitalism, in terms of things like consumer benefits and living standards,

● to those identifying potentially dangerous and threatening trends in lower class life, both individual, such as crime, and collective, such as Trade Union organisation.

The media is used to highlight and exaggerate "threats" and this becomes the excuse for political action against the working class. As **Kendall** (2011) argues, the media not only "*glorify the upper classes, even when they are accused of wrongdoing*" but also frame stories in ways that "*maintain and justify larger class-based inequalities*".

Gender representations are explained on the basis that where men generally have higher levels of economic power than women, representations reflect the aims and interests of the dominant gender.

Age representations reflect different perceptions of the young and the elderly; the former frequently represented as a **threat** (deviant youth subcultures, for example) that needs to be controlled, while the latter represent a **scapegoat** for economic problems; blame, for example, can be deflected away from a ruling class through representations of the elderly taking more than their "fair share" in terms of "gold plated" pensions, free social care and the like.

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg jogging in public - accompanied by 5 of his personal security staff…

Ethnic representations generally combine notions of *division* and *scapegoating*; ethnic minorities, for example, are constructed in various ways, from the collective threat of terrorism and challenges to the "British way of life" to the more-targeted threats of specific minorities such as "black youth gangs".

Evaluation

There are a couple of major criticisms we can note about this approach to understanding media representations:

Firstly, these types of explanation lean towards a **manipulative**, almost conspiratorial, approach to understanding how and why the media represents groups in different ways. This approach, historically reflected in the work of writers such as **Miliband** (1969) and adopted more-recently by writers such as **Jones** (2016) in his analysis of how the media "demonises the working class", argues that the *common cultural backgrounds* (family, school, work…) of economic elites "automatically" produces a common worldview: one that not only understands the shared economic interests of a range of groups that constitute the "ruling class" but which is able and willing to apply that understanding to protect their interests through media representations of "challenger groups and classes". Neo-Marxists, as we will see, have a rather different take on this relationship.
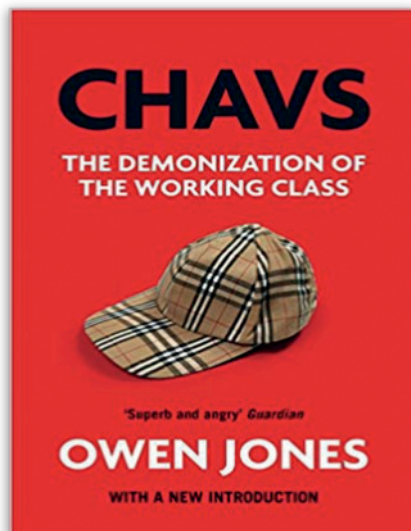
Secondly, a related criticism is that the general ideological thrust of Instrumental Marxism leads to evidence being *cherry-picked*; forms of representation that fit their general model are highlighted, while representations that don't fit are ignored, marginalised or denied. It's difficult to see, for example, how or why negative representations of women necessarily "benefit capitalism".

Not members of the upper class…

Neo-Marxism

While the concept of *ruling class political and cultural cohesion* remains a central one for Neo-Marxists, their explanation for critical cohesion involves arguing that the role of the media in capitalist societies is not necessarily to divide or scapegoat the lower classes as a way of controlling their behaviour (although this may often be a secondary, if largely unintended, outcome); rather, media representations are a way of creating and maintaining an elite's sense of its own cohesion *as a class*.

Where Instrumental Marxism explains class cohesion in terms of common cultural backgrounds, neo-Marxism uses the concept of **hegemony** to suggest cohesion is maintained through representations of "the Other"; by defining those who are not "part of the ruling class" the media functions to define for the disparate members of the ruling class the thing they have in common that unites them - an opposition to other social classes.

This explanation of the role of the media doesn't rely on a ruling class being a cohesive entity *prior* to using its economic power to manipulate public opinion. Rather, how and why the media represent different social groups becomes the cohesive factor in ruling class consciousness; by defining itself in terms of *what it is not*, it comes to see itself in terms of *what it is*.

Hegemonic control, in this respect, operates in the context of two ideas:

1. Inclusiveness defines the things a society *has in common*; from a sense of *nationality*, through shared *religious beliefs and practices*, to a *common territorial origin, political and economic values* and so forth. For neo-Marxists a significant role of the mass media is to define and propagate these *inclusive* characteristics - and while their particular properties may shift and change, the basic principle holds; there are some fundamental characteristics that "define Us" (a ruling class) as opposed to "Them" (not part of the ruling class).

2. Exclusiveness, on the other hand, defines "Them" or "**The Other**": people who, for whatever reason, are excluded from - and defined in opposition to - a ruling class.

Explaining representations in these terms - as a way of *defining inclusion and exclusion* that contributes, ultimately, to a sense of ruling class cohesion - means we can explain the differing shape and form of class, age, gender and ethnic representations in a way that doesn't rely on the media being directly controlled and manipulated by a ruling class.

Media and Ruling Class share an arm's length relationship

If media professionals see their role in *hegemonic terms* - as definers and protectors of a cultural cohesion that ultimately benefits the most wealthy and powerful - they can be relied upon to perform this role without the need for explicit manipulation.

Representations, therefore, reflect a sliding scale of inclusiveness and exclusiveness, the former defined in terms of complete consensus with prevailing ruling class norms and values and the latter in terms of complete conflict.

Class representations, for example, frame inclusion and consensus in terms of groups, such as business leaders, represented by positive virtues (*job creators*, *wealth creators*"…) in tune with inclusive values. Exclusion and conflict is represented by groups, such as Trade Unions, and individuals (criminals, welfare recipients, lower-class single-parents...) whose behaviours conflict with such values.

This explanation of class representations also allows neo-Marxists to represent "*upper class deviance*" as behaviour in need of criticism and control *when* it threatens elite cohesion. Such deviance - and in some cases outright criminality - is condemned and controlled, however, through a particular type of representation - one that individualises wrong-doing among the social elite.

Where "The Other" is invariably represented as a collective (*Muslims, Chavs…*) whose group characteristics are shared by its individual members, the reverse is true for upper class deviance: individual characteristics are not attributed to a whole class of people.

The worldwide banking crisis of 2008 was represented not as a collective ruling class failure but as a consequence of individual failures - such as "Sir" Fred Goodwin: CEO of Royal Bank of Scotland at the time of it's dramatic collapse in 2008. His disastrous management of the bank was punished by the loss of his knighthood in 2012.

Gender and **age** representations similarly reflect notions of inclusion and exclusion. Feminism, for example, is generally represented in ways that stress conflict and exclusion ("*political correctness*") while various age groups are represented in different ways depending on the contexts of their behaviours; youth subcultures are generally represented negatively precisely because they appear to threaten the media-defined consensus.

Ethnic representations. on the other hand, focus on explicit concepts of "the Other", with some minority groups represented in terms of various forms of "threat": to culture and "our way of life" or to society as a whole, in terms of things like terrorism.

One advantage of neo-Marxist approaches is their ability to explain *continuities and changes* in media representations of different social groups by reference to wider social changes in attitudes and behaviours.

Like their traditional counterparts, however, this approach has been criticised for underplaying the role of **audiences** in understanding representations. **Connor** (2001), for example, argues representation has two important dimensions:

1. How the world is presented to audiences through the mass media.

2. How people "engage with media texts" through their interpretation of media representations.

While the two are clearly connected - the media represents different social groups in different ways: some positive, some negative - neo-Marxism, in common with their traditional counterparts, tends to focus almost exclusively on the *former*. The critical question here, therefore, is the extent to which the representational messages sent by the mass media are received and understood by different audiences in the way they were initially intended?

The development of mass social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter suggest, at the very least, audiences are no-longer in thrall to conventional mass media messages in the way they perhaps were in even the recent past.

To put this more-sociologically, the rapid development of new media operating on a global scale suggests the *fragmentation* of media messages makes it much more difficult to see how *hegemonic control* through a mass media can successfully operate in contemporary societies.
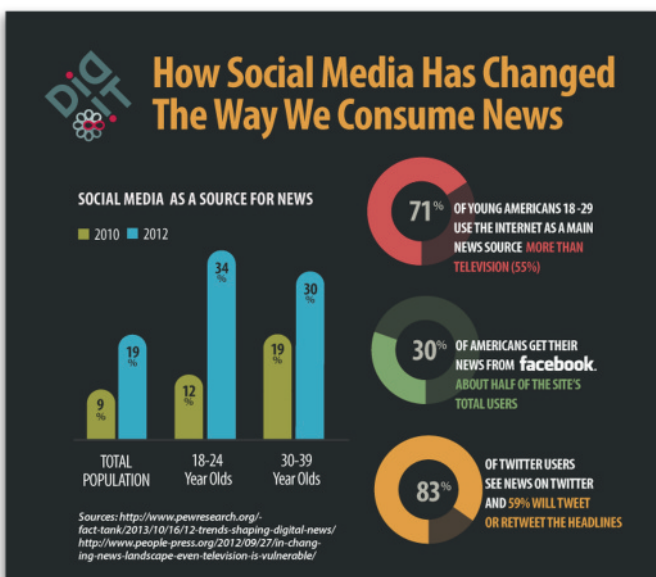
While the focus for all kinds of feminism is on how and why media representations contribute to *female inequality*, different approaches produce different forms of explanation.

Liberal

Liberal feminism generally focuses on how the mass media can be purged of *sexist* assumptions and representations, such that women in particular are neither *stereotyped* into a narrow range of roles nor represented in ways that disadvantage them in relation to men.

A combination of *legal and social changes* are the key to changing representations of women; strong **legal** barriers to sexist representations coupled with **moral** changes in how we generally view male-female relationships and statuses are the means to ensuring the media represents gender in more-equitable and balanced ways.

Slow but sure progress?

50 years after their first appearance (in The Sun), topless female pictures have finally been banished from the pages of UK newspapers.

Marxist

Marxist feminism, drawing on its connections to Marxist economic analysis, focuses on the commodification of women under capitalism: the idea female bodies are represented as **objects of desire.**

Gill (2003), for example, argues women are exploited by displays of naked female flesh because it represents them as *consumer objects* that can be bought and sold by men.

Commodification is also expressed in terms of how **sexist** stereotypes are used to sell a variety of consumer goods, from cars to newspapers.

For **Gill** commodification extends into newer areas, such as the use of female bodies as both 'walking advertising spaces' and as a means of making gender statements.

T-shirt branding (for both men and women) is an interesting contemporary example of gendered representations - whether they involve *free advertising* for popular brands, *sexualised self-presentation* (women, in particular, having the freedom to advertise their sexuality) or an example of how men and women collude in their own exploitation by representing themselves as one-dimensional sexual objects.

Run like there's a HOT guy in front of you and a CREEPY guy behind you.

VOGUE

The last thing I want to do is hurt you. But it's still on the list.

Radical

For **radical** feminists media representations are theorised in terms of **objectification**; women are represented in demeaning ways that suggest and cement their *lower social status* compared to men.

Media representations are an important dimension of **patriarchal control** and reflect how female lives and bodies are refracted through a **male gaze** that sees women as subordinate to men.

If your husband ever finds out
you're not "store-testing" for fresher coffee...

...if he discovers you're still taking chances on getting flat, stale coffee ...woe be unto you! For today there's a sure and certain way to test for freshness before you buy

Look like a girl
Act like a lady
Think like a man
Work like a boss

125 Years Of Evolution

1886

2011

125 years of evolution mechanically ... yet 0 years of evolution socially.
www.BeautyIsInside.com /Purple

EURONICS
Your local independent electrical retailer

BOSCH
Invented for life

Their representation through male eyes reflects male preoccupations and desires and reduces women to objects that exist for male gratification and service.

At its most obvious, the male gaze refers to areas such as *pornography* or the use of female bodies in *advertising*; less obviously, it refers to how images of women are presented from both the male perspective and for the gratification of a male audience – the viewer becomes a *spectator* (or *voyeur* in some cases), who looks, through male eyes, at women reduced to objects - a series of disconnected body parts.

While traditional forms of print (newspapers, magazines..) and electronic (television, websites…) media have produced more than their fair share of sexualised advertising focused around the male gaze, the development of new media platforms such as Facebook - by 2018 it accounted for 20% of the global advertising market - have taken this to a whole new level.

In Mulvey's (1975) original formulation of the concept the *male gaze* was essentially conceived as *voyeristic* - seeing the world (and female bodies) through the eyes of men in a way that was both immediate *and* distant: although female bodies were *on display* for male gratification there was a relatively clear boundary between "looking" and "doing".

Some forms of social media advertising have, in some respects, blurred this boundary by attempting to co-opt male viewers into a form of *active collusion* in the material they are viewing - a case in point being this 2011 Facebook advert for a brand of vodka.

On the plus side, the Belvedere ad only ran for *around an hour* on the platform before an outraged public response forced its removal and an apology from the company.

On the negative side, Belvedere Vodka received an unprecedented amount of free advertising…


Blurring the boundaries?

Post-feminism

Post-feminism takes a different approach by seeing both men and women represented in terms of traditional stereotypes and ways that challenge, confront and break stereotypical gender barriers - ideas that reflect both the **heterogeneity** of media and gender in contemporary societies.

There are now, for example, many different ways of "doing gender" compared with the relatively simple *binary oppositions* (male and female) of even the recent past. This has led to writer's such as **Butler** (2004) arguing that we have now reached a stage where the concept of "*undoing gender*" - breaking it down into a multiplicity of constituent parts that "*undo restrictively normative concepts of sexual and gendered life*" - is a more-accurate form of representation.

In this respect post-feminists emphasise the significance of changing social attitudes towards gender and its representation. Where gender categories have become more **fragmented,** it becomes more difficult to think in terms of "fixed genders" and static forms of representation: where some media feature conventional femininities, others represent women in a range of unconventional ways.

However, the crucial argument for post-feminism is the extent to which men and women can seek-out the media that best reflects their self-perception. In other words, the focus here is less on how the mass media represents and determines gender identities and more on how individuals use the media to construct their own representations and sense of self.
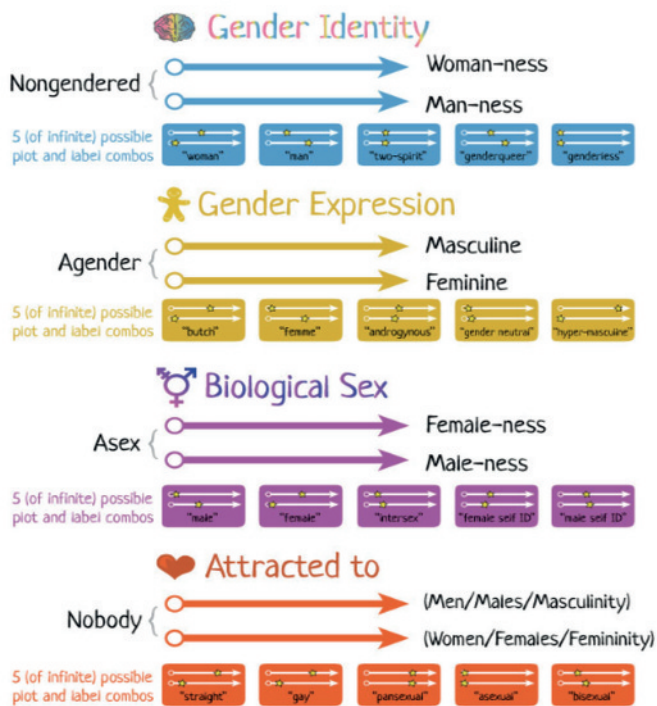
Killermann (2018): The Genderbread Person v2.0

Evaluation

Feminist arguments, although many and varied, turn on both changes to traditional forms of overtly sexist representation and the *meaning* of these changes.

Gill, for example, argues contemporary representations, while no longer depicting women as '*passive objects*' of the male gaze, are not 'liberating' but merely a more exploitative form of what **Bordo** (1993) calls a '*new disciplinary regime*'. This reflects the idea that while contemporary media representations offer the 'promise of power' by suggesting women can *choose* whether to become 'sex objects', this promise is illusory since all forms of objectification are demeaning to women.

Gauntlett (2002), however, argues the media can be a force for *change* rather than repression, with the gradual disappearance of traditional representations of women, as housewives and sex-objects.

He argues greater media-literacy means audiences understand representations in an *active way;* that is, we shouldn't simple assume media messages are received uncritically and acted on mechanically by unquestioning, media-illiterate, audiences.

He argues, for example, that young people in particular are able and willing to think critically and reflectively about the media they consume - to *actively construct* a variety of self-representations rather than to simply be *passively constructed* in the (male) media's image.

Pluralism

Pluralist explanations recognise a variety of different media representations involving categories such as gender. They also emphasise the importance of the role of the *audience* in interpreting such representations - ideas that relate to two dominant themes in pluralist explanations.

1. Diversity: Contemporary media and audiences are characterised more by their *differences* than their similarities; wide differences *within* categories like class, age, gender and ethnicity makes the Marxist approach of reading audience responses from media representations increasingly problematic.

2. Choice: Diverse audiences make diverse **choices** about what, when and how they consume different media - which puts the audience in control of, rather than being controlled by, the media.

For pluralists, *the media follow the market* and audiences are given the types of representation they want. The kinds of (c)overtly racist, sexist and homophobic representations once found in British sitcoms, for example, once reflected a society largely tolerant of such things. Where contemporary audiences are less tolerant of such representations this type of programming no longer exists on mainstream television: it would be commercial suicide.

For those who find 24 / 7 News Channels a bit too exciting…

Media diversity, therefore, is encouraged by changing audience tastes and higher levels of economic competition for audience share. General representations of class, age, gender and ethnicity have undergone two important changes that flow from increased competition, audience and media diversity and choice.

1. For relatively **undifferentiated** mass audiences, there is now less tolerance of overtly sexist and racist representations; this stems partly from wider social and legal changes and partly from the way new media, such as Twitter, makes representations easier to police. Audiences can respond quickly and directly, through social media networks, to representations they find offensive (as in the case of the Belvedere Vodka advert we previously highlighted).

2. The development of digital media has lead to **niche programming**. Minority groups can seek out media channels - from TV stations, through magazines to web sites - that reflect their personal tastes and interests.

Diversity of access and consumption, therefore, widens the range of representations available to audiences who are able to pick and choose what they see, hear and read to match their own particular needs.

Evaluation

Pluralist approaches add an important dimension to our understanding of media representations by their insistence on seeing audiences as *active participants* in, rather than passive receivers of, media messages. This is significant because it starts to *problematise* the simple assumption that audiences passively consume whatever the media gives them - a position that is increasingly untenable in the digital age.

Critics, however, point to the idea Pluralists overstate both the *separation of media ownership and control* and the *power of audiences* to determine media content. Although the Internet makes it more difficult for owners to control what their audience see, read and hear, old media often have far larger audiences than equivalent new media; they may also be **trusted** more by their audience, which makes them easier to manipulate.

Despite fierce competition from old and new media, the BBC remains one of the most trusted global News services.

Similarly, **Collins** (2002) argues competition does not automatically guarantee media diversity. Although a wider range of media products are now available, these products are owned by a relatively small number of global conglomerates; similar representations are presented in a range of different packages that merely give the impression of choice.

In addition, where choice does exist it comes at a price. Those who can afford it get unlimited choice; those who can't have to accept what they're given.

Postmodernism

Throughout this section we've generally talked about representations in terms of how and why they *misrepresent* particular social groups.

Baudrillard (1995), however, argues representations shouldn't be considered in terms of whether something is fairly or unfairly represented. This follows, he argues, because *how* something is represented *is* its reality.

Conventional approaches to explaining the significance of media representations suggest the media "re-presents" something like 'news' in a way that's somehow different to the original event: '*something happens*' that is then described (*re-presented*) to an audience.

Conventionally, therefore, sociologists contrast 'the real' - the 'thing' that 'happened' - with its **representation** and examine the media to see if they can disentangle the *real* from the *not real*.

**Baudrillard** however argues "reality" is experienced differently depending on:

● *who you are* (male, female, young, old, black, white…),

● *where you are* (in a country, such as the UK, that has a diverse media or one, such as China, where media is tightly controlled)

● *your source of information* (one that aims to provide as objective account of something as possible, or one that simply tells you what you want to hear).

Every audience, therefore, 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 *real*; everything is simply a representation of something seen from different viewpoints. Thus, the 'reality of anything' can't be found in any single definitive account or experience

Baudrillard uses the term **hyperreality** to express how different narrative accounts interweave and conflict in an ever-changing pattern of representation-built-upon-representation until they form a 'reality' in themselves – something that is "*more real than the reality they purport to represent*" since our knowledge of 'reality' is itself the product of different representations.

Each reality, therefore, is constructed from the way individuals *pick-and-choose* different ideas to suit their own particular prejudices or beliefs. **Baudrillard** calls this process **simulacra** ('representations that refer to other representations') or **simulations** that are the hyperreality they depict.

To talk about media representations as distortions of some hidden or obscured 'reality' ('*deep structures*') misses the point: The media don't simply 'mediate the message' through representations; as **McCluhan** (1992) argues "they *are* the message".
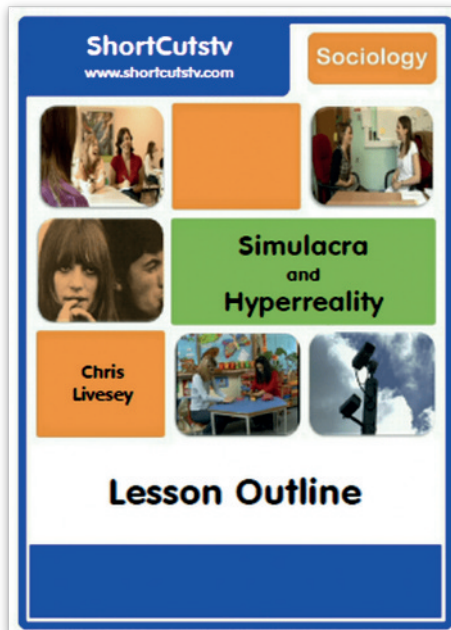
" Read All About It"

This idea is important in relation to something like the *social construction of news* (and it can be extended to cover the social reproduction of *anything* - from gender to ethnicity) since news reporting involves a representation of reality that **Fiske** (1987) calls the **transparency fallacy** – a rejection of the idea news reporting represents a neutral 'window on the world' that objectively reports events as they unfold. The world represented through the media is always and inevitably a *reconstructed reality* – one filtered through a media lens that is no more and no less objective than any other reality filter.

Postmodernists argue **power**, in terms of control over the production and distribution of information, is no longer concentrated within **institutions**, but within **social networks**, where it 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 Marxist and Feminist notions of power as **centred**, on class and gender respectively, and that misrepresentations flow from this centred control of information.

Lyotard (1984), for example, argues that in postmodernity there are "many centres" and that "none of them hold". In other words, in postmodernity there are many centres of information, each of which pumps-out different representations of categories like class, age, gender and ethnicity.

Unlike in the past, however, there are no dominant forms of representation because there are no dominant forms of media anymore. What we have, in a media-saturated society built on information structures and networks, is a series of shifting representations of these categories.

Evaluation

While postmodern approaches provide a new and different perspective on media representations, critical evaluations focus on three areas:

1. The extent to which *producers and consumers converge* is overstated; in terms of mainstream mass media, whether old or new, the distinction between producer and consumer is still important. This means how the media represent social categories has far more salience and currency than postmodernists allow.

2. Media diversity and audience literacy is overestimated; we still, for example, find a relatively narrow range of representations in the mainstream media sources used by very large audiences. The critical sophistication of new media audiences and their ability to separate out different sources of information is also questionable.

Bennett et al (2008), for example, argue that the claim young people are somehow "*digital natives*", with a sophisticated grasp of "how the media works" lacking in their older counterparts ("*digital immigrants*"), is not one that stands-up to a great deal of critical inspection.

The ability to use technology is not the same as the ability to understand it…

3. The idea the media "is the reality it represents" is questioned by **Strinati** (1992); this view, he argues, gives too much significance to the media and ignores a wide range of other information sources - such as our interpersonal relationships - that have stronger claims to influence.

The Effect of the Media on Society

This final section addresses how - and in what ways - audiences are affected by the media they consume by outlining three models of media effects that can also be linked to and explained in terms of, different types of theoretical explanation.

Direct Media Effects

These types of effect are called often called **mediacentric** or **transmission** models because they focus on the role of the media and argue they have a **strong**, usually **negative**, **direct** influence on audiences. This general model has a relatively long history, with older iterations suggesting a relatively *simple, direct and effective* relationship between the media and their audiences:

Hypodermic…

The *hypodermic syringe* (or *magic bullet*) model argues media messages are like a drug injected into the body; the media transmit messages that are picked-up and acted upon by the audience (*receivers*) in ways that change or reinforce their behaviour in line with whatever message is being pushed and promoted. The general argument here is that media messages *determine* how audiences see and understand the world in a directly measurable *causal* way.

The media (*cause*) transmits information and the audience reacts (*effect*) in a *broadly predictable* way that is **immediate** and directly attributable to the message received. Audiences, in this respect, are characterised as **passive receivers** rather than **active interpreters** of media messages.

Transmission..

These models, initially developed by **Shannon** and **Weaver** (1949), suggest the **transmission process** of media messages is split into two parts;

1. The **information source** (such as a government announcement)

2. The **transmission source** (such as a newspaper or television report of the announcement).

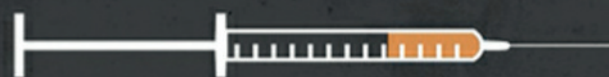Media messages, therefore, can have different sources:

- **direct reporting** might involve a newspaper printing a speech made by a government minister.

- **indirect reporting** involves the speech being selectively quoted to support a particular story.

Transmission models, while still suggesting media effects are direct and immediate, are an advance on the basic hypodermic model in the sense that the source of the message significantly affects (or *mediates*) how it is received by an audience.

In this variation it's also possible for audiences to be *indirectly* affected by a media message through their **interaction** with people who are *directly* affected - people, for example, who pass on media messages, through their everyday conversation, to those who haven't personally experienced them.

This type of indirect media transmission is particularly applicable to something like social media where an original direct media message is picked-up, modified, amplified, criticised and so forth on platforms like Twitter, Reddit, Facebook and the like.

THE HYPODERMIC NEEDLE THEORY
- DEVELOPED IN THE 1920s AND 1930s
- LINEAR COMMUNICATION THEORY
- PASSIVE AUDIENCE
- NO INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCE

A by-product of this form of direct-indirect transmission is the addition of a further layer of interpretation by introducing concepts of *noise* and *interference* - defined as anything that distracts from or interferes with the transmission of a message. Conventional media, such as newspapers, can introduce noise through *selective reporting*, while audiences may receive the same message in different ways - some directly, others indirectly.

Evaluation

In terms of media effects, the basic Hypodermic model has a relatively long history - one that, not uncoincidentally, is tied into technological changes in how media are delivered (from the print media of the 19th century, through the development of radio and television in the 20th century, to the Internet in the 21st century). Each technological development has, in its different way, given rise to a resurgence in interest - particularly in the popular imagination - in this model.

This is partly because the model is particularly simple and easy to understand - a new and powerful medium develops that seems to exert an undue influence on relatively unprepared audiences - and this makes it particularly easy to grasp. When presented, for example, with a new and powerful medium of communication that comes to dominate the lives of many millions it's not difficult to see why people would be both concerned about the possible effect of such media and looking for explanations to justify such concerns.

It's also, therefore, partly because of what we might term "the shock of the new". When a new medium develops and is taken-up by large numbers of people it ripples normative expectations. It creates, in other words, a certain level of confusion - a mildly-anomic condition - over how the new medium might impact on social behaviour.

And it's also partly because, in the early - mid 20th century, the apparent success of political propaganda techniques - British, German, American and Russian - lends the model a certain credibility. State propaganda, for example, particularly but not exclusively during the 1st and 2nd world wars, seemed to exert a powerful, almost hypnotic, influence over the behaviour of many millions of disparate individuals.

We also need to be aware that the kinds of societies in which *modern* forms of mass media developed were quite different in scope to the kinds of late / post modern society that have developed in the late-20th - early-21st centuries.

The former were, for example, much more rigidly-stratified in terms of media ownership: the mass of the population had little or no access to the production of media messages (production was in the hands of governments, hugely-powerful individuals ("media barons") and large-scale corporations. In such a situation, therefore, it's not difficult to see why audiences were generally considered uncritical, gullible, passive and receptive individuals easily influenced and led by whatever they read, saw or heard in the media.

One piece of evidence often cited to support the idea of uncritical audiences and the power of the hypodermic model is the actor / director **Orson Welles**' infamous *War of the Worlds* broadcast (1938), a radio play cleverly designed to simulate a Martian attack (yes, really…) using the news broadcasting techniques of the time. The received wisdom here is that many Americans believed they were hearing about a real invasion and panicked in a variety of ways; the evidence for this 'mass hysteria' is, however, actually very thin (it is, to co-opt a currently-popular phrase "fake news").

From an audience of around 6 million, *some* people clearly did feel unsettled by what they heard (a police station in the area of the supposed invasion answered around 50 calls from worried residents), but accounts of people 'fleeing to the hills' have been grossly exaggerated over the years. The remarkable thing about this story is not so much people believed what they were hearing, but that the behaviour of the vast majority of listeners was not influenced or changed in any appreciable way.

As we've seen with the development of the Internet - and social media in particular - once the media was opened-up to "the masses" this audience characterisation couldn't be convincingly sustained in the face of critical, questioning and highly-active audiences.

The fact some contemporary audiences do appear to be uncritical, gullible and hugely-receptive to media messages simply adds to the sense of explanatory confusion surrounding the hypodermic model - something that, at least in recent times, has led to attempts to square this circle by modifying the basic model to focus on "vulnerable audiences". That is, the idea that while "most people" are largely immune to media messages "some groups" (such as children, the mentally ill and the elderly) are much more prone to the uncritical reception of media messages.

In relation to children, for example, the basic argument here is their lack of social experience and a tendency to copy behaviour makes them more amenable to direct media effects (and copy-cat violence in particular) than adults. Actual evidence for direct effects, however, tends to be anecdotal - the media claim, rather than prove, a relationship between, for example, violent behaviour and violent play.

While **Anderson et al's** (2003) review of "direct effects research' argues there is "*unequivocal evidence media violence increases the likelihood of aggressive and violent behaviour*", **Cumberbatch** (2003) argues that "*If this analysis was a car, the door would fall off in your hand and the thing would collapse half way up the street*". **Gauntlett** (1995) also demonstrates how even very young children may be media literate - they have an understanding about the media and how it works; most children, for example, can distinguish between fictional and factual representations of violence.

In relation to the elderly, a recent study by **Guess et al** (2019) found they were much more likely to share "fake news" on Facebook: "On average, users over 65 shared nearly seven times as many articles from fake news domains as the youngest age group".

They do, however, qualify this statement by noting that "First and foremost, we find that sharing this content was a relatively rare activity".

While transmission models are a more-sophisticated explanation of media effects than their hypodermic counterpart - although they suggest some form of direct effects, these can be mediated through different channels and sources, which makes it more difficult to measure the exact effect of the media on audiences - **Gauntlett** (1998), among many others, suggests the **empirical evidence** for direct media effects is weak, partly because most research has taken place under **artificial conditions**, such as a laboratory, that inadequately represent the real situations in which people use the media.

Bandura et al's (1961) 'Bo-Bo doll' experiment for example, is frequently cited as evidence that watching televised violence produces violence in children. One of the (many) weaknesses of the study was that the children were 'rated for violence' by adult assessors, which raises questions about research objectivity. **Belson** (1978) is also cited as evidence 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.

Cumulation theory, a more-recent modification of direct effect models, suggests media effects are **cumulative**, rather than immediate; prolonged exposure to violent films or computer games can result in both changed behaviour and **desensitisation***;* the more someone is exposed to media violence, for example, the less likely to be moved, shocked or appalled by real violence.

Applying Direct Effects Models: The Frankfurt School

A major problem for traditional Marxism has been the general failure of the working classes to develop a sense of **class consciousness** that would enable it to become a **"class for itself"'** to challenge and replace a capitalist system through which it was systematically oppressed, exploited and impoverished.

One explanation for this "failure" looked to the emerging mass media in the early part of the 20th century, understanding its role as a cultural support system for a **dominant ideology** of capitalism and as a source of **false class consciousness** - a way of preventing the working class understanding the true nature of its oppression, through things like entertainment and misrepresentations of the social world.

The **Frankfurt School**, for example, developed **manipulation theory** to explain how the media directly attempts to influence audience perceptions; 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"**. With few links to wider social networks providing alternative sources of information and interpretation, audiences are uniquely receptive to whatever the media transmits.

The media mirrors other forms of **industrial production** in capitalist society by creating various elements of a **popular culture** - film, magazines, comics, newspapers and so forth - 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".

Indirect Media Effects

An alternative argument, sometimes called a **cultural effects** model, is that while effects are still strong, they are **slow**, **cumulative** and operate through the media's ability to embed itself in the cultural background of the society in which it operates. The media, in this respect, plays an *hegemonic role* in people's everyday interaction - and the heavier the consumption, the greater the media's long-term influence.

Cultivation theory, for example, suggests television, in particular, cultivates what **Gerbner** (1973) calls distinctive attitudes and orientations in its audience over time, rather than directly determining behaviour.

Those aged 65+ watch the most television in both Britain and America.

People who watch a lot of television, for example, gradually take on board the beliefs and attitudes to which they're exposed; where crime is a constant television staple, audiences become fearful of crime in ways that are out of all proportion to their risk of victimisation or personal experience.

Gerber called this "**mean world syndrome**", the idea that constant exposure to violent media content - both physical and verbal - leads individuals and groups to conclude that the world is much more dangerous, violent and *meaner* place than it actually is.

For Gerber, therefore, a significant media effect is the cultivation of attitudes about the world that then translate into real-world behaviours. While this doesn't simply mean that exposure to media violence makes individuals more violent, as hypodermic models tend to claim, it does mean that people approach their wider social relationships - both primary and particularly secondary - with a mindset that sees others as potentially aggressive and violent.

The *cultivation of meanness through media*, therefore, suggests that where some people approach their relationships with others "prepared for the worst" it makes real-world aggression much more-likely.

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 don't change overnight - media effects are gradual, long-term and build slowly over time - the result of a range of influencing techniques that include:

1. The consistent **promotion** of one set of ideas to the exclusion of others. These become the *dominant discourse* when a particular issue is discussed in the media. This discourse shapes the debate and demands to be addressed by all involved.

One example here is the dominant discourse over the past 30 or so years about Britain's membership of the European Community. The debate is continually shaped by questions of *immigration* - both legal and illegal.

Another is the issue of *knife crime* and the recent rise in fatal stabbings, particularly, but not exclusively, in London. This issue is most-commonly framed in the mass media as a problem of "gang culture" and any discussion of knife crime is predominantly framed by this narrative: how to combat gangs, how to prevent "vulnerable youth" joining gangs and so forth.

As **Irwin-Rogers** (2018) puts it "*During (my) many meetings, roundtables and conferences on youth violence, I have been struck by people's fixation on gangs whenever the issue of youth violence arises*".

When **Irwin-Rogers** looked at the knife crime statistics produced by the Metropolitan Police, however, he discovered that the reality of knife crime seemed far-removed from the media-fuelled discourse: "*In 2016, just 3.8% of knife crime with injury (fatal, serious, moderate and minor) had been flagged by the Metropolitan Police as gang-related*".

2. The **marginalisation** of dissenting views: ideas that deviate from the "*accepted media consensus*" rarely, if ever, appear in mainstream mass media.

Applying Indirect Effects Models: Neo-Marxism

For neo-Marxism, there is no automatic relationship between economic ownership and control over the means of mental production. The relationship between a ruling class and the media is both *indirect* and *ambivalent*. **Curren** (2002), for example, argues 'The conviction the media are important agencies of influence is broadly correct. However, the ways the media exert influence are complex and contingent'.

Cultural effects theories, therefore, see the media as a powerful influence: overwhelmingly supportive of the *status quo* and *core capitalist values*, but also capable of asking important and difficult questions. The primary role of the media is **cultural reproduction:** to promote and police cultural values since, as **Newbold** (1995) puts it, the media is embedded in social relationships and works "to produce and reflect powerful interests and social structures' - ideas that reflect an **hegemonic** dimension to media effects and social controls; one that allows alternative views and interpretations to develop.

Hall's (1980) use of **reception theory**, for example, involves the idea media messages always have a range of possible meanings and interpretations, some intended by the sender and others read by the audience. This involves two processes:

- **encoding**, or the intended message.
- **decoding** - how the audience interprets the message. The latter depends on a variety of factors, including class, age, gender and ethnicity, and is significant because the receptiveness of an audience determines how the message is understood and, by extension, its effectiveness

Audiences are seen as **relatively autonomous**: although people have the ability to accept, reject and modify media messages, this is always influenced by class, age, gender and ethnic factors. Someone who can't afford a personal jet, for example, is unlikely to be swayed by an advert to buy one. Relative autonomy means media messages can be interpreted in different ways, depending on the background characteristics of the receiver. **Hall**, for example, suggests three main readings:

• **Hegemonic**: The audience shares the assumptions and interpretations of the author and reads the message in the way it was intended.

• **Negotiated**: The audience broadly shares the author's views, but may modify their interpretation in the light of their own particular feelings, beliefs or abilities.

• **Oppositional**: The audience holds views and values opposed to the author and rejects the message.

The relationship between media and audience is, in these terms, **reflexive** - the one influences and modifies the other in a circular fashion. This means the media has to work harder and more subtly to attract, retain and influence an audience,. Contemporary advertising tries to establish a *brand* with which an audience identifies, rather than simply repeating the words "Buy me!". In this respect the media attempt to establish hegemonic control through **agenda setting**; they repeatedly try, according to **Severin and Tankard** (2001), to put certain ideas and issues in the public sphere at the expense of others.

However, as **McCombs and Estrada** (1997) note, being told *what* to think about doesn't guarantee an audience will think about it in a particular way, which is why **framing** is an important aspect of agenda setting; ideas are presented in ways that suggest to audiences how they should be interpreted (as with the related idea of preferred readings). **Simon and Xenos** (2000) argue framing primes audiences to understand issues in terms of 'elite discourses'; how dominant media groups - a ruling class, men, whites… - encourage audiences to understand an issue. In this way, the media create mythical realities for audiences - especially those heavily immersed in media - that construct the world in terms favourable to ruling elites.

Alternative viewpoints and interpretations to the dominant media discourse are either not reported or are the subject of intense questioning and criticism.

3. The **repetition** of dominant ideas until they assume a **taken-for-granted** status. Between 1995 and 2015, for example, "everyone knew" (because that was the dominant media discourse) that "crime was rising" - when both official police crime statistics and evidence from sources such as the British Crime Survey showed that, overall, crime had declined significantly over this period.

The media, from this viewpoint, lead people in certain directions, towards particular ideas and ways of thinking about the world.

As **Gerbner et al** (1986) put it "*the continual repetition of patterns (myths, ideologies, 'facts', relationships, etc.) serve to define the world and legitimize the social order*".

Evaluation

Cultural effects theories involve **methodological** problems related to *measuring* effects that are slow, cumulative, indirect and long term - such as how to measure attitude or behavioural changes in an audience that are the result of media, as opposed to some other, effects.

More fundamental problems relate to the definition and tracking of media effects, since just about *anything* can be advanced as evidence to support the theory.

● If an effect is identified, this demonstrates the media's hegemonic role.

● An inability to identify effects, however, doesn't, disprove the theory since "oppositional readings" may explain why there are no effects.

Cultural effect models have also been criticised on **conceptual** grounds.

● **Corner** (1983), for example, argues it is difficult to show *empirically* which, if any, reading is a *preferred* one in a situation where there are always many possible readings of a text. This situation has, if anything, become even more complicated with the development of the Internet and social media.

● **Myers** (1983) also argues it is in an advertiser's interest to create a *range of preferred readings*, so their product will appeal to a wide and differentiated audience. In other words, effective advertising, in a similar way to effective news reporting, depends on the ability to create a range of possible readings of a particular product.

A single preferred reading is an important part of neo-Marxist arguments because it explains how dominant groups exercise hegemonic control; if there can be many different readings embedded in a text, this makes the concept - and the theory it supports - more problematic.

A further problem is the use of **semiological analysis** to disentangle deeper cultural meanings from the everyday "surface reality" of media messages. Quiz shows, for example, can be interpreted as harmless escapism or as indicative of capitalist values of greed, consumerism and individualism - with no empirical way of deciding between the two.

In relation to **cultivation theories / mean world syndrome** there is also the problem of *causality*: those who, for whatever reason, distrust the world may be much more-likely to consume (violent) media that fits their preferred view of that world. Rather than the media causing distrust, mean-minded people simply consume media, such as violent films and games, that fits their view of the world.

Limited Media Effects

A third general approach, sometimes called **audiocentric** or **diffusion** theories because they focus on how audiences *use the media* to satisfy their own particular needs, suggest few, if any, measurable effects directly attributable to the media.

Diffusion theories focus on how media messages spread throughout an audience, based on a trickle-down effect; although messages originate with media producers, they are received by an audience both directly - such as personally viewing a news broadcast - and **indirectly**, through interaction with those who directly received the message, other media sources reporting the original message, social media and so forth. **Katz and Lazarfield**'s (1955) **two-step flow** model, for example, argues messages flow:

1. From the media to opinion formers - people who directly receive the original message.

2. Through them to people in their social network - people who receive the original message in a **mediated** form. That is, they recei*ve an edited, condensed or embellished* version of the original message.
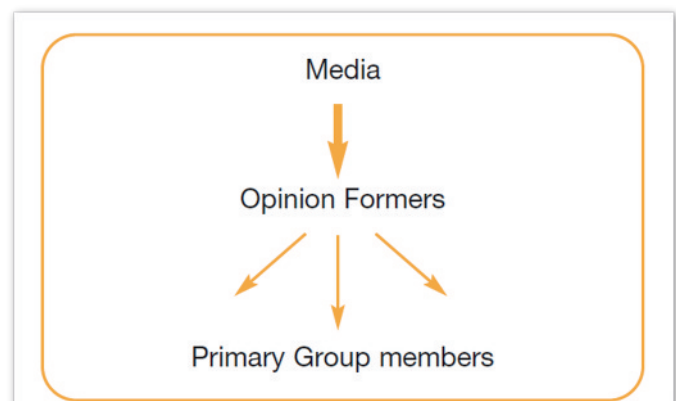

Two-Step Flow Model

These "informal, interpersonal relations" - at the time **Katz and Lazarfield** were writing this mainly involved direct face-to-face interaction and communication (family, school, friends, work colleagues…) but this can be easily extended to encompass the kinds of social interaction currently found on social media sites - were and arguably remain the key to understanding how mass audiences responded to media messages.

The basic argument here is that any behavioural changes in an audience are the result of how messages are interpreted, discussed and reinterpreted within **primary groups** (groups whose membership we value) rather than from any direct media influence.

This version of *diffusion theory*, therefore, has three main elements:

• **Primary social groups** are a more significant influence than the media.

• **Interpersonal sources** of information are significant influences on how people receive and respond to media messages.

• **Limited direct effects**: Behavioural changes are likely to result from the way media messages are interpreted, discussed and reinterpreted within primary groups, rather than from any direct media influence.
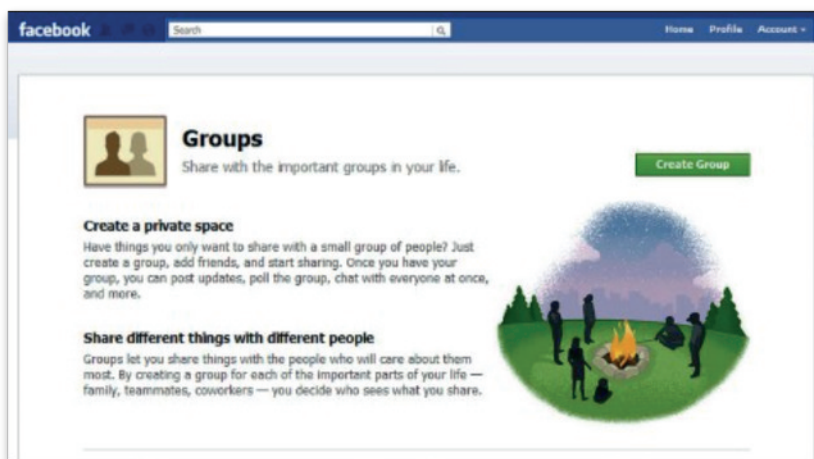
Online primary groups?

Diffusion theories, although originally developed 50-odd years ago, actually translate quite easily into contemporary audiences and their relationship with social media - particularly those, like Facebook or Twitter, that aim to develop communities of like-minded individuals who share common interests and ideas.

In contemporary societies, therefore, electronic communities may constitute *primary groups* for an increasing number of people and their interaction blurs the line between "the media" and "the audience" - an idea compounded by **Shannon** and **Weaver's** (1949) concept of **noise**; the original message easily becomes lost, over-simplified and misrepresented when mediated through social interactions.

On this basis, contemporary mass communications function 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 both offline and, increasingly perhaps, online.

● **Retention:** people remember things that fit with their beliefs and forget those that don't.

● **Selection:** some messages are never relayed and never reach their intended audience.

The implications here are that while "the media" may have an unknown effect on people's lives and perceptions we should stop thinking about "media" and "audience" as distinct and separate.

We should also stop thinking about "media effects" in terms of something "the media" does to "an audience". In an increasingly important sense, the media *is* the audience: information is picked-up, changed, adapted, transmitted and retransmitted *by* an audience *to* an audience with little or no input from conventional media sources such as television and newsprint.

Uses and gratifications takes the separation between media and audience a step further by arguing consumers 'pick-and-choose' both media and messages: they use the media to satisfy a range of gratifications, such as *four primary uses* suggested by **McQuail et al** (1972):

1. Entertainment – as a diversion from everyday life, to relax, for mental stimulation and so forth.

2. Social solidarity: Talking about a shared experience, such as seeing the same film or television programme, serves an **integrating function**; people feel they have things in common with each other.

3. 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 a sense of self.

4. Surveillance - providing news and information about an increasingly complex world.

Severin and **Tankard** (2001) suggested a further use - *companionship* - when they found the heaviest media users were those who were lonely and / or socially isolated.

Are audiences taking on the role of media?

Evaluation

Although the idea of *active audiences* is an important dimension of our understanding of media effects, its significance is *overstated*.

Choice, for example, may be extensive in terms of different publications, but in limited by ideological similarities. While different newspapers, for example, may offer different specific political viewpoints, all conform to very similar *core values* (no major UK newspaper, for example, offers a critical analysis of capitalist economics).

Stam (2000) goes further by claiming limited effects models **essentialise the audience** - to the relative exclusion of all other possible influences - by giving them an unwarranted and unsupported primary significance in terms of how media messages are interpreted.

Diffusion models broadly suggest the media has few, if any, effects - yet billions of pounds are spent each year by **advertisers** precisely because the media does have clear and measurable effects; these may not be simple or clear-cut, but the principle remains strong.

On the other hand, it's not hard to find evidence to support the claim that "media effects" are overstated.

Over the past 20 years, for example, UK media have regularly transmitted messages about the possible dangers of mobile phone use (from brain cancer to memory loss and sleeping disorders) - yet despite the possible dangers, mobile phone use hasn't declined, let alone stopped.

While one reason for this might be a general belief such warnings are either untrue or exaggerated, another way of looking at this is through **Festinger**'s (1957) concepts of:

• **Cognitive assonance**: In broad terms, if a message *fits* with our personal and social (primary group) beliefs we are more likely to consider it favourably.

• **Cognitive dissonance** involves the reverse idea.

If the message *doesn't fit* with what we want to hear, we respond in a variety of ways: by questioning it, dismissing it, ignoring it or working out a way to twist it to fit with what we already believe. We find, in other words, some way to rationalise - and effectively neutralise - the dissonance we experience.

Applying Limited Effects Models: Interpretivism

For Interpretivists the key to understanding media is how people receive and interpret messages, rather than how or why these messages are transmitted. This follows, as **Hallahan** (1997) argues, because *"people can look at the same message and focus on different aspects to draw different conclusions about the message's meaning"*. Unlike Marxist models where the focus is on the producer of media messages, for Interpretivists the focus is on *understanding audiences*.

Where **transmission models** argue the media creates the audience, either directly (*hypodermic*) or indirectly (*hegemony*), Interpretivism argues *audiences create the media in their image*, through their *consumption choices*; popular media flourishes, unpopular media fails.

Diffusion models in this respect reverse the causality; where hypodermic models, for example, argue the media can cause an audience to become violent, the former argues those who *like violence* seek-out and use violent media to satisfy their needs.

This is an argument reflected in **reinforcement theory**; people seek out media that *reinforces* rather than challenges their worldview.

While primary groups (such as family and friends) fundamentally shape people's beliefs and behaviours, *secondary groups*, such as the media, merely reinforce these beliefs.

What this suggests, therefore, is that the relationship between the media and audiences is a complex one; a relationship that can't be easily characterised in a simple "either / or" way: either the media has an impact on audience beliefs or it doesn't.

Postmodernism

Postmodern approaches offer a fundamentally different type of explanation for media effects, initially in terms of ethnographic analyses of audiences. These move the effects debate away from an analysis of 'the media' and onto a cultural analysis of audiences and how they interact with different media.

An important dimension here is a move away from the notion of mass audiences, in terms of their actions and reactions, to audiences differentiated by age, gender and ethnicity as well as by more individualised categories such as cultural and technological competence. Whereas 40 or 50 years ago the "mass media audience" was largely homogeneous (relatively undifferentiated) in terms of tastes, general beliefs, identities and so forth, audiences today are much more fragmented.

This methodological shift - to focus on audiences rather than media - reflects a postmodern concern with how and why media are used in the construction of personal and social identities, an important component of which is how we understand and use media technologies. This, more-specifically, involves examining how media spaces - from print to television and the Internet - are structured.

To do this we need to understand both relatively simple issues - "Who uses what media in what contexts and for what purposes?" - to more complex issues about control and ownership of technology and how our media use fits into the general flow of social behaviour.

A further postmodernist strand focuses on exploring cultural competence - how different audiences bring different levels of literacy to their media use. In this respect, how people use the media - and what they take from it - depends on their familiarity with that media and this extends from things like understanding the conventions of films (how, for example, they manipulate our emotions), through the expectations we have for different media (what can and can't it do?), to the ability to master new and different technologies.

Another dimension to postmodern understanding is to consider how we engage with technology - the hardware and software that increasingly surrounds us. Forty years ago, for example, UK audiences had to cope with two television channels. Now, we are surrounded by technology, from 100's of television channels to smartphones, tablets, wearable computers and the "Internet of Things" - how various consumer goods, from televisions to fridges and microwaves, are connected through the Internet.

While this suggests far higher levels of contemporary technological engagement - we not only use more devices, they are also more-deeply embedded in our personal lives (think, for example, about how you'd feel if you had no access to a smartphone, tablet or desktop) - the main question here is the extent to which audience fragmentation, allied to an increased understanding of "how the media works", has altered or limited our ability to be manipulated in some way by mass media.

Consuming while creating?

Post-effects

Postmodernism, in this respect, embodies a different theoretical approach to understanding possible "media effects"; one that challenges conventional relationships seen in terms of media, in the sense of content producers, and audiences (content consumers).

It suggests the kinds of conventional media effects theories we've reviewed here no-longer have much currency. To try to apply them to contemporary forms of media and audiences would merely be to look for the wrong things in the wrong places in the wrong ways.

This follows because, despite their differences, conventional effects theories all assume a relatively hard-and-fast distinction can be made between media producers and consumers.

● For *traditional Marxism* the relationship is clear and separate (producers are the dominant partner).

● For *neo-Marxism* the relationship is more ambivalent (producers dominate in some respects, but consumers have a significant interpretative role).

● For *interpretivists* the dominant role is played by consumers who are able to pick and choose various forms of media consumption that meet their particular needs and purposes.

Where postmodernism differs from most other sociological perspectives is in the characterisation of information structures. Whereas modernist approaches, such as Marxism or Pluralism, view information hierarchically (the flow is from producers at the top to consumers at the bottom), **Castells** (1996) suggests postmodernists characterise societies in terms of networks that 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 (media organisations, governments and so forth) but within social networks where information is both produced and consumed by the same people.

Flat, non-hierarchical information networks…

Information, therefore, flows between different points (people) within a network in such a way as to make it impossible to distinguish between producer and consumer (because they are, effectively, one and the same). **Tuomi** (2002), for example, identifies the characteristic features of postmodern media in terms of:

• *User as producer* - they are, as just suggested, the same people.

• *Backstage is frontstage*: This reflects **Goffman's** (1969) idea of social interaction as a performance; just like an actor in a play, we prepare and evaluate our public (or frontstage) performances "backstage" - in private, as it were. **Tuomi** adapts this idea to argue that with something like social media there is no backstage - all interaction is played out within the confines of the medium (**Meyrowitz,** 1994).

• *Content reflects interpretation*: In other words, the way different people in the network interpret information contributes to the development of the media - a reversal and rebuttal of the Marxist idea of a preferred reading.

The main implication here is that we have to discard (modernist) concepts such as truth or falsity when thinking about the ideological role of the media. All knowledge, from this perspective, is ideological - which makes it a fairly pointless exercise trying to argue some forms of information are more (or indeed less) ideological than any other form.

This consequently means it is no-longer possible to think about "how the media affects people" in the ways conventionally proposed by (modernist) effects models.

Probably not the most reliable and valid way to test media (lack of) effects

Perverse Spectators

One reason for this is the postmodern focus on the concept of meaning; where conventional media effects theories assume various levels of separation between 'the media' and 'the audience' Staiger (2000) argues the media have no immanent meaning (one that is fixed and unchanging).

Audiences, she argues, are perverse spectators; they use media in their own way - and for whatever purpose - through "**activated meanings**".

These are meanings created through the ways an audience interacts with media. In other words, the meaning of a soap opera, drama, news broadcast or whatever, is created and expressed in numerous different ways by whatever each viewer brings to their consumption and enjoyment of the programme; the meaning of EastEnders or a news broadcast changes each and every time it is viewed by different individuals.

This makes it impossible to quantify 'media effects' in any meaningful or coherent way since any 'effect' is changed each time it is identified. This idea holds true for both:

● the present - the meaning of a media text is changed immediately it is consumed.

● the past; horror films, for example, that were once considered shocking are now more likely to elicit laughter than fear.

These ideas lead to a couple of different ways of looking at "media effects" in post-effects society.

Audience as media

The first way of looking at "effects" in postmodernity is to think about the changing nature of the relationship between audience and media that has been brought about through changes in media technology and use.

Rather than being separated, as most conventional effects theories argue, the development of new media - from personal websites through blogs to massive social networks like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram in Europe and America and WeChat in China - has led to a situation, as Tuomi argues, in which the audience can be both the producer and consumer of media texts.

The audience, in this respect, is the media and the media is the audience - the two are interchangeable and indistinguishable. One is simply a reflection of the other.

The exception that proves the rule? Psycho (1960) still makes me nervous about taking a shower…

for media research and effects theories. Although a producer may have some idea about how they would like an audience to receive and understand their texts, each reader interprets that text in terms of their own ideas, beliefs, cultural and technological backgrounds.

If, as **Basulto** (2011) argues, social media is a force "obliterating the distinction between the producers and consumers of culture" and **Napoli** (2016) contends that "audiences are both consumers and (increasingly) producers or creators of media products", this raises important questions about "media effects": not just in terms of conventional ideas about how "the media" influences "an audience" (if, indeed, we can talk about such things) but also in terms of a more radical reappraisal of the idea of "media effects" *per se.*

Media as audience

1. The fragmentation of potential audiences.

2. The development of new political and cultural identities and allegiances among these fragmented audiences.

The basic idea here is that postmodern societies become decentred, they fragment into smaller groupings focused around their different claims to particular political and cultural identities.

This general idea, although shot through with debates about media literacies, competencies and the uneven spread of technological development both within and between societies, is significant because it suggests a different direction

This creates a problem, of sorts, for media producers because they can no-longer reply on their content, print or electronic, routinely reaching a "mass audience". Rather, media producers are forced to target content at niche markets - small, but highly active and keenly interested groups with quite specific interests.

There has, of course, always been an element of media producers modifying their output for particular audiences.

●UK newspapers, for example, have always been targeted at particular audience demographics. The Daily Star, for example, tailors its output (it's difficult to actually classify it as "news") to a working class demographic while The Times looks to an entirely different, far more affluent and up-market, audience.

●Special interest magazines have similarly targeted particular demographics - from sport, through motor vehicles to fashion.

To be fair, it's not always easy to tell…

What makes the producer-consumer relationship different in postmodernity is the idea that changes to the audience produce changes in the media.

Audience fragmentation means competition for audience share intensifies among competing producers as they each strive to create content that appeals to a specific audience demographic. Media organisations, in other words, focus content on appealing to *niche audiences* - but the major difference between niche programming in the past and *nouveau niche programming* is that rather than produce content that then seeks to attract an audience, some - but not necessarily all - media companies *identify an audience and explicitly tailor their content to what that audience wants*.

In some instances this simply translates into the kinds of conventional niche marketing we've just noted. In others, such as how news is selected, represented and presented, there is a dependence on what the target audience demands - something that reverses the conventional relationship between media and audience. In this situation media producers effectively become "the audience"; they create content that directly reflects whatever view of the world their particular consumers hold - a level of understanding achieved by the kinds of sophisticated audience surveillance made-possible by the Internet and social media: the willingness, knowingly or otherwise, of individuals to disclose massive amounts of information about themselves in exchange for "free access" to a media platform such as Facebook.

In basic terms, an "audience" is the source of a particular set of ideas and interpretations about the world that their preferred media simply shapes and reflects back at them. The media - a contemporary example of which might be something like the cable-channel Fox News in America, a "producer" that channels a highly-particular worldview demanded by its predominantly elderly, white, male and conservative consumers - becomes the audience for whatever worldview is held by consumers.

Nouveau niche?

For this approach, it's no-longer possible to talk about "media effects" in the way we've conventionally theorised them here. Rather, the main effect in postmodernity is the impact audiences have on media producers: there are few, if any, conventional "media effects" because the conventional relationship between media and audience no-longer exists.

Evaluation

While critics of these approaches to understanding the role and effects of the media in late / postmodernity have acknowledged the changing nature of both media and audiences, there's a strong argument that claims about the dissolving relationship between media producers and media consumers have been overstated. There is, for example, little or no evidence to support the claim of some commentators that "Social media has completely deconstructed the traditional channels of media and human communication".

What is critically clear, however, is that the social and media landscape today is quite different to 40 or 50 years ago (or even pre-Internet) and one important consequence of this change is the audience voice; that is, the ability of individuals to express their thoughts, hopes, fears and so forth through a wide variety of media channels that didn't exist pre-Internet.

A major aspect of the changing media landscape is the rise of "platform media": corporations, such as Facebook, who provide a platform for audiences to "create media" through the expression and exchange of their views, much of it in real time. Such Corporations, while not being conventional media organisations who produce and distribute their own content are, however, increasingly coming to resemble the types of organisation they are supposedly replacing "in postmodernity".

Fox News:
Telling it like it isn't?

Facebook, for example, increasingly selects and presents news content across its platform in ways that ape conventional news organisations and it acts to "censor" content (such as hate speech) by banning users where it decides such content infringes its rules.

While such platforms have led to a re-evaluation of what we mean by media producers and consumers, it's not true to say they have replaced conventional media organisations. There are, for example, a wide variety of national and global media corporations that continue to successfully produce content that is simply consumed by an audience.

While such audiences may not be as overtly passive as in the past (Game of Thrones and Star Wars fans, for example, have been extremely vocal in their criticism of the latest content produced by the global media corporations behind their production), there's no real sense in which these audiences are anything more than media consumers.

In terms of media effects, therefore, while powerful and potentially influential media organisations exist - from conventional "old style" media companies like News International to less-conventional evolving "media carriers" like Facebook, WeChat or Twitter - relatively powerful audiences also exist, although the power of the latter is less concrete, more-ephemeral, ill-defined and constantly changing than that of their corporate media counterparts.

This suggests, at the very least, we need to examine both of these elements - media organisations and media audiences - if we are to understand both media effects and the media landscapes in which they are played out.

While postmodernism questions the possibility of mass media through "unsustainable distinctions" between media producers and media consumers - the two eventually become indistinguishable - an alternative view is that regardless of how, in late / postmodernity, we actually define media "producers" and "consumers" the effects of their behaviour are real, tangible and can be both theorised and measured.
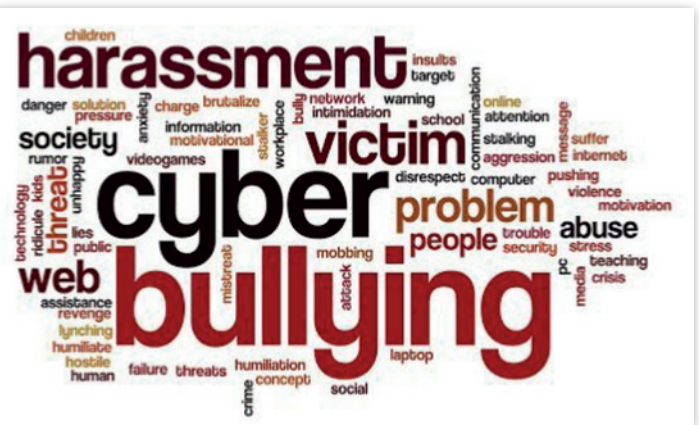
We could, for example, quite happily apply something like **cultivation theory** to understand the effects of audience interactions on social media.
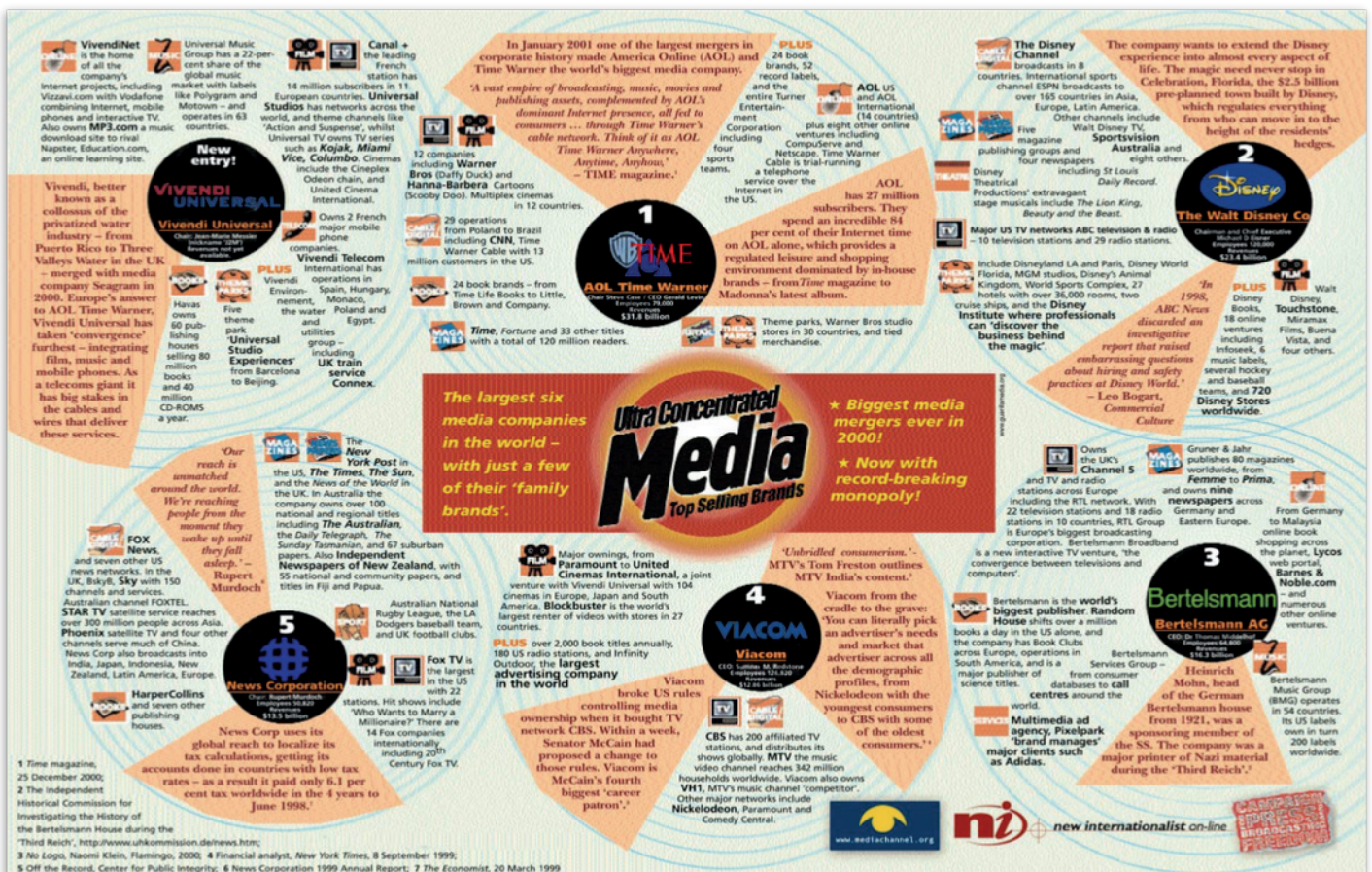
Effects of the Media on Wider Society

As we've seen, debates over media effects polarise around two opposing interpretations:

- those (traditional and neo-Marxism) who see the media as having significant effects.

- those (Interpretivists and Postmodernists) who, for differing reasons, see the conventional idea of media effects as limited at best.

While these debates tend to focus on *individuals and groups with society* (differentiated in various ways by class, age, gender and ethnicity) there is a *broader debate* about the role and *effects of media in society as a whole*.

Unsurprisingly, these debates also polarise between those who see the role of the media positively, as a force for liberation and freedom and those who see it more negatively - as a force for oppression and control.

Before we outline examples of these positions it's important to note that the debate has moved-on in recent years, with the development of new media forms that both challenge and complement old media. As recently as a generation ago the debate was framed in terms of national borders and the impact of state controls on media that operated within a broadly national context (with obvious exceptions, such as Hollywood and the American film industry).

Presently the debate is increasingly framed around **globalisation**, its implications and tendencies. Cultural institutions such as the media, in a similar way to economic institutions and, to a lesser extent, political institutions, increasingly operate on a global scale and this has important implications for the role of the media across both national and international borders

Positive Effects

Both Pluralists and Postmodernists point to a range of ideas to support the argument that the media has a number of beneficial effects, one of the most significant being *choice*; the diversity of available media reflects every viewpoint and no viewpoint - an apparent contradiction resolved by observing that as media becomes more diverse it comes to represent and reflect a range of competing worldviews rather than a single worldview.

No single discourse is able to dominate.

Culturally, choice and diversity has a knock-on effect across a range of institutions and behaviours. Gender and age groups, for example, find themselves *empowered* by greater freedom of personal expression and a less restrictive moral order, as reflected in the media.

Butler (1990), for example, argues *gender scripts* are no-longer limited and restrictive, but many and varied; there are now more ways to "perform gender". The same holds broadly true for categories such as class, age and ethnicity.

More generally, a significant media effect is the creation of a greater *global awareness* of:

- economic trends (such as the development of areas 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 differences.

Politically, media choice and diversity brings with it a greater questioning of "authority". **Lyotard** (1984), for example, argues a defining feature of postmodernity is its '*incredulity towards grand narratives*' - the "*big stories*", such as religion, science or political philosophies, that claim to explain "*everything about something*".

Postmodernity also involves a scepticism towards claims of "truth" as an *objective category* - truth and falsity can only be distinguished *subjectively*, on the basis of our values. Such incredulity towards **metanarratives** means the media is less likely to influence behaviour in the way it might once have done in the past.

This scepticism may, of course, have it's downsides. The emergence of a globalised "anti-vaccination" movement, whose ideas are spread through social media, has led, for example, to the re-emergence of diseases, such as measles, that are relatively easily controlled through cheap and efficient vaccinations.

Postmodern approaches, as we've suggested, offer fundamentally different types of explanation for media effects, particularly in terms of the detailed ethnographic analyses of audiences that seeks to understand under what circumstances and why people use different media in different ways.

These approaches, in other words, move the effects debate away from an analysis of 'the media' to a cultural analysis of audiences and how they interact with different media.

One important dimension here is a move away from the notion of *mass audiences*, in terms of their actions and reactions, to audiences differentiated by age, gender and ethnicity as well as by more individualised categories such as cultural and technological understanding and competence.

This methodological shift reflects a general concern with how and why media are used in the construction of personal and social identities, an important component of which is how we understand and use media technologies.

Ethnographic approaches, in this respect, explore media use in terms of ideas like social space and how different media are integrated into different spaces, particularly the private space of the home, but also given the uptake of mobile technologies over the past 10 - 15 years, public spaces such as the workplace, schools, leisure spaces and so forth.

A further political dimension facilitated by the development of new media is the changing nature of *political representation* - the public can not only interact directly with elected politicians, through email and social networks, they can organise quickly and easily around political issues to put pressure on politicians to act in particular ways.

New media opens-up greater opportunities for discussion and self-expression, with voices being heard that in the past went heard. This, in turn, has a significant impact on how we understand the deviance of political leaders or large-scale transnational corporations; both, for example, are under increasing *sousveillance* - surveillance "from below".

Negative Effects

Those who argue for the media having a generally negative effect point to a different set of ideas.

Economically, global processes of *concentration and conglomeration* have accelerated, with giant media corporations dividing-up global markets and operating as an oligarchy that prevents entrance to media markets, restricts competition and limits consumer choice.

Rather than media *diversity*, **Lechner** (2001) argues there is a tendency towards *homogenisation*; the global reach of transnational media corporations creates a particular kind of "consumerist culture, in which standard commodities are promoted by global marketing campaigns to create similar lifestyles".
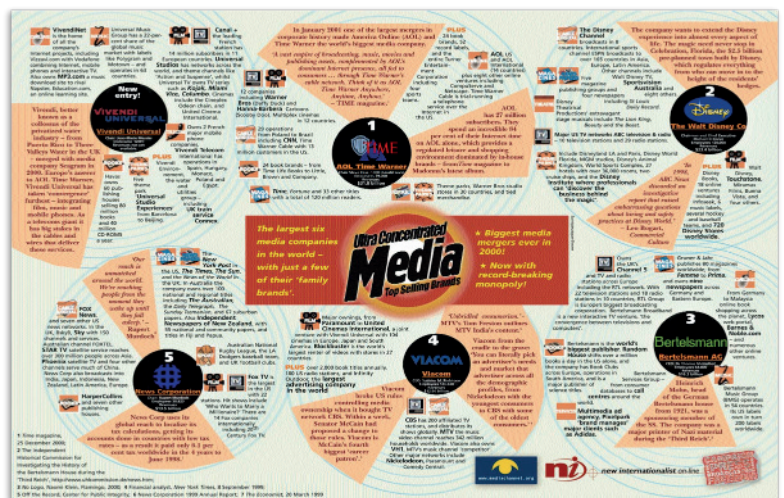
The development of peer-to-peer networks has led to the exponential rise of intellectual property theft ("piracy") which, while a problem for mega-corporations, may be economically disastrous for small production companies.

On a national level the ease with which media can be duplicated has lead to widespread disregard for copyright and patent rights, plus the state-sponsored hacking of commercial secrets In 2018, for example, the American government claimed the theft of copyrights and patents by China remained at "unacceptable levels".

The development of computer networks has presented problems for media industries whose products are easy to copy and distribute, with no loss of quality thanks to digital reproduction. Global media conglomerates have responded in a range of ways, such as:

- legal prosecutions of individual offenders and attempts to shut-down illegal providers (such as Napster in the past and Megaupload more recently).

- the development of new economic models. "Freemium" models, for example, provide a service (such as software or a game) for free but users then pay for "added extras". Hugely popular Facebook games, such as Farmville, have successfully applied this model.

Politically, global media corporations have tended to cooperate with oppressive regimes rather than challenge their legitimacy.

In China, for example, state censorship of both traditional and new media remains the norm with both indigenous and Western media companies; Yahoo, for example, censors its Chinese search results to exclude information banned by the Chinese government.

While Western democracies don't operate the same type and level of media censorship as countries like China (with their "Great Firewall" that blocks access to banned sites and web pages), control and surveillance has been extended through new technology and new media.

Social networking sites, for example, collect, store and sell massive amounts of personal information about users, while mobile phone technology can be used to both track individuals and monitor their contacts. The lack of new media regulation allows for the expression of all kinds of racist, sexist and homophobic ideas that would be unacceptable - and probably illegal - in old media.

Culturally, global media are instrumental in fostering *cultural hegemony*, whereby local / national cultures are colonised by the products and lifestyles of dominant cultures. The global domination of the American film industry is a good example here.

Global media corporations have encouraged the spread of a particular form of neo-liberal economic ideology based around individualism and the "*fetishism of the self*" (*because we're worth it*...). Instagram, for example, has been colonised by "social media influencers" acting as "cool ambassadors" for a wide range of global products.

The development of "open admission technologies", such as the Internet, is also changing how we see the relationship between age categories like childhood and adulthood. Where the Internet can't differentiate between adults and children the latter are exposed to contgent (sex, violence, news and so forth) that diminish our ability to decide where childhood ends and adulthood begins: children become more like adults in terms of their general behaviour, sexuality, dress and language while adults become more "childlike" in their equation of youthfulness with health, vitality and excitement.

One major effect of globalised media, therefore, is the promotion of a *consumption culture* where the consumption of goods and services - from mobile phones to social networks funded by advertising - is simply seen as an end in itself.

Some of the categories Facebook records about individual users that is made available to advertisers who want to target specific demographics…

ShortCutstv
www.shortcutstv.com