Topic 4 - The mass media and audiences

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SOCIOLOGISTS ARGUMENTS ABOUT THE MEDIA HAVING DIRECT EFFECT UPON THEIR AUDIENCES AND TRIGGERING SOCIAL RESPONSES (BEHAVIOURS/ATTITUDES)

- Gerbner et al (1986) - representations of violence in certain types of media contribute to violent crime and antisocial forms of behaviour in real life, especially committed by the young.
  - **Feminist views**
    - Consumption of pornography that's easily accessible through the internet is harmful in terms of encouraging sexual violence and negative attitudes towards women
    - Size zero models on social media may be producing a generations who suffer from eating disorders.
  - **Interactionalist sociologist views**
    - Cohen and Young (1980) - the influence of the media in the creation of moral panics has increased social anxiety and fear among the general population and have even led to changes in social policy and laws.
  - **Marxist views**
    - OLD - media transmitted a mass culture which was directly injected into the minds of the population making them more vulnerable to r/c propaganda
    - CONTEMPORARY - the way the media is organised and operates in capitalist societies may be influencing parts of the population to believe in cultural values that benefit r/c ideology. They argue that the media representations of women, ethnic minorities etc.. may also be creating and reinforcing negative stereotypes of these groups and others
- The power of advertising has had an instant effect on the sales of a product, especially if it is promoted by a celebrity.
- Advertising towards children has resulted in 'pester power' and pressure on parents to buy their children's love.
- Norris (1999) - media coverage of political issues can influence voting behaviour. e.g. BBC covering the election/candidates behaviours

Hypodermic model of media violence:

- The view that the media are very powerful and the audience is very weak. The media can 'inject' their messages into the audience, who accept them without question.
- Assumes all audiences are PASSIVE – unable to resist messages that are 'injected' in them.
- The audience is filled with dominant ideology and violent images, this model suggests that as soon as passive audiences see this, they immediately go out and act it out.

Believers of this model point to films which caused horrible crimes:
- Columbine Massacre – blamed violent video game 'Doom' and the movie 'The Basketball Diaries'
- Jamie Bulger case – two young boys (aged 10/11) killed a little boy, it was believed it was due to them watching Child's Play and 'video nasties'.

Imitation or copycat violence
- Bandura's Bobo Doll study – conducted a correlation study to see the direct cause and effect relationship between media content and violence. He showed 3 groups of children real, film and cartoon examples of a Bobo Doll being hit with a mallet + verbal aggression. A 4th group was not shown any aggressive activity. The children were then made to be frustrated by being shown toys that they couldn't play with. They were then led to a room to play with toys. The 3 groups displayed physical aggression towards the Bobo Doll. Bandura concluded that violent media content could lead to imitation/copycat violence.
- Martin – argued that imitation was a likely outcome of media violence but it is argued that it can have a disinhibition effect – convinces children that in some social situations, violence can be used and normal rules can be broken.

Desensitisation
- Newson – investigated the effect of violent films and videos. She concluded that sadistic images in films/on the internet were too easily accessible to viewers and was easy for people to identify with the violent perpetrators.
- She suggested that the long exposure to the media violence may have a 'drip-drip' effect on young people over the course of their childhood and as a result would desensitise them to violence – they become socialised into accepting violence as a normal behaviour, especially when needing to solve problems.
- She concluded that the latest young generation had weaker morals and were more likely to behave in more anti social behaviour because they are becoming desensitised.

Censorship
- Newson's conclusions led to the censoring of both films and TV programmes.
- Video Recordings Labelling Act 1985 – certified films and also insisted that filmmakers make cuts to use of bad language and violence.
- TV – nine o'clock watershed and warnings of violence and bad language before certain programmes.

Feminist perspective -
- Morgan (1980) - suggested that pornography is the theory, rape is the practice.
- It is suggested by some feminists that there is a direct link between pornography and sexual violence.
- Dworkin (1990) - suggest pornography trivialises rape and makes men increasingly want to inflict pain on women.
  HOWEVER, Hald (2007) concluded that men and women generally consider pornography as a positive influence on their lives.

Critique of the hypodermic syringe model

- **Preventing real life violence**
  - **Catharsis** – watching violent movies/TV shows can provide a safe outlet for people's aggressive tendencies.
    - A study to support this would be Fesbach and Sanger (1971) – teen boys were given a diet of TV shows in which one half watched violent TV and the other watched non violent shows. The result was that the group that watched only violent shows showed less aggressive behaviour. In conclusion, by immersing themselves into the violent films, their aggressive energy was released in a safe way.
  - **Sensitisation** - Jock Young (1981) argued that seeing the effects of violence can make people more aware of the consequences and less likely to commit them. He suggested that violent scenes can be so graphic and shocking that it can put people off violence.

- **Methodology** – the method of the studies to support the hypodermic model has been questioned
  - **Gauntlett (2008)** criticises the way the Bandura Bobo Doll study was carried out. There are issues with validity because the experiment was conducted in an artificial lab, not in the real world. This is a criticism because it is not sure if the children would actually carry out violent acts to real people in real situations. Also, there are issues with participant reactivity and demand characteristics because the children may have been aware that they had to hit the doll, in order to be seen as a desirable Pp.
  - Also, violence is not defined, is it real violence? The study fails to acknowledge that the context of the violence can impact the affect it has on its audiences.

- **Children as sophisticated media users**
  - The hypodermic model suggests that everyone is vulnerable and passive to the messages the media sends at us. But we are able to distinguish between real violence and cartoon/fake violence from an early age. We are also aware that violence watched should not be imitated or we will be punished (through learning/reinforcement SLT).
  - **Evidence to support this** – Buckingham (1993) found that children are more sophisticated in their understanding of media content and more media literate than previous researchers assumed. E.g. his sample clearly differentiated between fictional violence and real violence.

- **Audiences are not homogeneous**
  - Factors such as age, maturity, class, education etc. can influence how people respond to media content. There are therefore not passive receivers of media messages like the hypodermic model assumes.

- **Scapegoating the media**
  - The hypodermic model uses the media as a scapegoat for everything that's wrong in society. But there are other factors that could be causing violence like a person's biological make up, family upbringing, peer pressure, drugs etc. E.g. Bowling for Columbine documentary – Moore says that there isn't just one cause, its like blaming bowling for their massacre, they really liked bowling but that didn't cause it, this is the same for video nasties.

Active audiences:

Sees the media as far less influential. They believe that people have considerable choice in the way they use and interpret the media. They are not passive.

1. The two step flow model
- **KATZ and LAZARSFELD (1965)**
  - Suggested that personal relationships and conversations with significant others such as family, friends, teachers and work friends result in people believing or rejecting media messages
  - They argue that social networks are usually dominated by OPINION LEADERS. They suggest that the media messages go through 2 steps
    - 1> The opinion leader is exposed to the media content
    - 2> Those who respect the opinion leader internalise their interpretation of that media content.

2. The selective filter model – Klapper (1960)
  - 1) **Selective exposure** – A message must first be chosen to be viewed, read or listened to. These choices depend on people's interests/education.
  - 2) **Selective perception** – The messages have to be accepted, the audiences may choose to take notice or reject the message.
  - 3) **Selective retention** – Messages have to stick, people are more likely to remember something if they agree with it. Postman (1986) argues that we live in a 3 minute culture (3 mins attention span)

3. The uses and gratifications model
- **Blumler and McQuail (1968)**
  - They see the media as active.
  - They suggest that the people use the media in order to satisfy particular needs that they have. These needs could be biological, psychological or social. More importantly, they should be relative. The way the audience use the media to satisfy their needs will depend upon influences such as social position, age, gender... the 4 needs which people use TV to satisfy:
    1. Diversion > we use TV to escape from routines/worries. People may immerse into particular types of media to make up for a lack of satisfaction at work/daily lives.
    2. Personal relationships > we know more about TV show characters than our own neighbours.
    3. Personal identity > the use of media for their own identity e.g to improve their wardrobe, latest trends
    4. Surveillance > use the media to obtain info about news and the world to help them make up their minds on particular issues.
- **Lull (1995)**
  - Audiences actively use the media in 5 ways:
    1. Relational – media used for making conversation with people, gives people something to talk about
    2. Affiliation – TV may reinforce family community
    3. Avoidance- media used to escape the real world
    4. Social Learning – people may use media to find answers and access a role model e.g. celebrity
    5. Competence dominance – certain family members may use their authority to control the amount of media everyone accesses.
  Marxists criticise this model because they suggest that needs may be socially manufactured by the media. Marxists argue that the mass media in capitalist societies, especially the advertising industry, promote ideology involving consumption and materialism as good things to have. This may mean that people mistake false needs for personal or social needs.

4. The Cultural Effects Model - 'drip-drip model' - NEO - MARXIST MODEL (new type of Marxism)
- The view that the media are so powerful that they have linked up with other agents of social control to encourage particular ways of making sense of the world. They see them as transmitting capitalist values and norms.
- This model recognises that media audiences are made up of different types of people from a variety of social backgrounds who have had different experiences. This means that they interpret what they see and read in different ways.
- However, the Marxist cultural effect theory argues that the media messages have strong ideological messages that reflect the values of the media owners.The producers expect the media audiences to respond in a particular way – preferred (dominant reading).
- R/c ideology constantly bombards the public through media because they have power that they can filter through into society via the media. The public w/c will eventually believe the r/c ideology to be natural and true. This is called cultural hegemony. Thus the w/c will accept the values without realising it.
- THE MORE AN IDEOLOGY IS DRIPPED INTO SOCIETY BY THE MEDIA, THE MORE PEOPLE BELIEVE IT AND ACCEPT IT AS TRUE!
- Contemporary examples of this – size zero models/big hips and butt – dripped into magazines, Instagram, more and more people desire to be like that.
  These cause and effects are very difficult to operationalise and measure.
  Pluralists question the idea that the view of the capital elite make up the main constitutions of ideology. They argue that this underestimates the role of professional and objective journalism in constructing media content.
  Marxists claim to be the only ones who see the true ideological interpretation of media content, which implies that the rest of use are 'cultural dopes'.

5. RECEPTION ANALYSIS MODEL:
- Suggests that the way people interpret media content differs according to their class, age, gender, ethnic group.
- Morley (1980) - research into how audiences interpreted content on a 1970s news show. Morley examined how people from different educational and professional backgrounds interpreted ideological content of programmes through use of in-depth interviews.
- Morley found that audiences were far from passive in their reading of media content, instead they made up their own minds. The reception analysis model concluded that people choose 1 of 3 interpretations of media content:
  1. Dominant reading - reading of media content based on consensus, most people are likely to go along with it because the subject matter is widely accepted as legitimate. Their views are more likely to be shared by journalists and is likely to underpin news values.
  2. Oppositional reading - a minority may oppose the views expressed in the media content.
  3. Negotiated reading - audience may reinterpret media content to fit in with their own opinions and values. e.g. they may not have any strong views on the Royal Family, but enjoy reading about celebrity lives.

- Morley argues that the average person belongs to several sub-cultural groups and this may complicate a person's reading of media content in the sense that they may not be consistent in their interpretation of it. Reception analysis theory therefore suggests that audiences are not passive, impressionable and **homogeneous(not the same)**. They act in a variety of subcultural ways and, for this reason, media content is **polysemic**, i.e. it attracts more than one type of reading or interpretation.

Postmodernism and reception analysis
- The postmodern model focuses on how individual members of audiences create their own meanings from a media text.
- Postmodernists see media content as producing one particular definition of reality, which has the same degree of importance as any other definition of reality.
- These interpretations of media reality are constantly changing and being modified, therefore are not fixed.
- Rather than seeing the audience as an undifferentiated mass, or as divided into cultural or other groupings, postmodernists argue that generalizations about media effects and audiences are impossible, since the same person may react to the same media message in different ways in different situations.

Post-modernist Model
- Strinati (1995)
  - argues that the media today are the most influential shapers of identity and offer a greater range of consumption choices in terms of identities and lifestyles. Moreover, in the PM world, the media transmit the idea that the consumption of signs and symbols for their own sake is more important than the goods they represent.
  - BASICALLY, the media encourages the consumption of logos, designer labels and brands and these become more important to a person's sense of identity than physical clothes and goods themselves.
- Other PMS say that since 2000, the globalisation of communication has become more intensive which has led to a great significance for local cultures.
- Thompson – last ten years the globalisation of communication has become more intensive and extensive.
- This has had great significance for local cultures, in that all consumers of the global media are both citizens of the world and of their locality.
- Seeing other global experience allows people to think critically about their own place in the world (hybridized media culture).
- Lull – notes how television opened up localized ways of thinking and seeing the world and made available new perspectives, lifestyles and ways of thinking and responding to the world.
- However, Thompson notes that the interaction between global media and local cultures can also create tensions and hostilities
- E.g. the Chinese authorities have attempted to control and limit the contact that the Chinese people have with global media, whilst some Islamic commentators have used global media to convince their local populations of the view that Western culture is decadent and corrupt.