

Topic 1 – Ownership of the media

3 Types of media:

1. Print media – owned and produced to make profit for the publishing companies that own them e.g.. Newspapers and magazines
2. Audio visual media – owners often generate profit through subscription or advertising revenue. However, most of it is publically or state owned. E.g. Satellite TV, radio
3. Cyber media – new types of media including social networks, games

The Structure of British Press Media : Curran (2003)

1937 - 4 Press barons owned every 1 in 2 newspapers in the UK. Now - 8 companies own them:

1. News Corps - Rupert Murdoch , Times, Sun, Sunday Times
2. Associated Newspapers - Lord Rothermere, Daily Mail, Metro, Evening Standard
3. United Newspapers - Richard Desmond, Daily, Sunday Express, OK!
4. Telegraph - Barclay Brothers, Daily and Sunday Telegraph
5. Independent - Tony O'Reilly, Independent and Independent on Sunday
6. Pearsons Group - Viscount Cowdray, Economist, Financial Times
7. Trinity Mirror - Mirror and Mirror on Sunday
8. Guardian Media Group - Observer and Guardian

The Structure of the British Broadcasting Media: Curran (2003)

The content of the commercial TV is controlled by ITV plc. This company owns 11/15 TV franchises.

Channel 5 is owned by 3 companies - Pearsons, Bertelsmann and United Business Media

Access to satellite TV is generally controlled by BSkyB and Virgin Media

Horizontal Integration/Cross Media Ownership - Big media companies that won a diverse range of media. E.g. Virgin

Vertical Integration - Companies try to control all aspects of media to maximise profits. E.g. Time Warner controls all stages of productions, filmed at own studio and premiered at their own cinema complexes

Diversification/Lateral expansion - When firms spread risk by moving into new areas of business. e.g. Virgin

Global Conglomeration - Companies that have a presence in many countries, operating in a global market

Synergy - When 2 companies partner up to promote and produce items. E.g. merchandise Spiderman

Technological Convergence - The trend of putting several technologies into one media product

Public Service Broadcasting - Media outlets that are controlled by the state, which have a world-wide reputation for impartiality.

Mass media – agencies of communication that transmits information, education, news and entertainment to mass audiences.

Concentration of media ownership: Bagdikian (2004)

6 major corporations control all the media in the USA: Time Warner, Disney, News corps, Sony, Viacom CBS, General Electric NBC

PLURALIST THEORY OF MEDIA OWNERSHIP:

Modern capitalist societies are democratic

Left, right and centric wings are given the opportunity to express their views. The most persuasive argument will result in their representatives being voted into power.

The Mass Media are an essential part in this ideal because most people get their knowledge of politics from newspapers and TV. They therefore argue that the media owners are objective, responsible and facilitators of this political process.

The economics of media ownership:

The behaviour of the media owners is constrained by the market.

Readers, viewers and listeners are the real power holders because they exercise the right to buy or not to buy.

The media gives the audience what they want because they hold the power to buy.

Pluralists argue that the reason for media concentration (smaller companies merging as a large company) is for economic reasons rather than political or ideological because they argue that media products are costly to produce.

Concentration of ownership is aimed at the maximisation of audience size in order to reduce costs and attract advertising revenue.

Vertical and horizontal integration and synergy reduce costs because media companies should no longer need to use services from other media companies who might be competing with them. Also, profits are enhanced because they no longer have to deal with the fluctuating prices of their competitors.

Pluralists argue that it is practically impossible for owners to interfere in the context of newspapers and TV because they are economically far too complex to take regular interest in the content of programmes or newspapers. **Whale (1977)** argues that the media owners have global problems of trade and investment to occupy their minds so they don't have time to think about the day to day details of running their media business.

Media diversity

Pluralists argue that the range of media products available is extremely diverse. As a result, all points of view in a democratic society are catered for.

Public service broadcasting

Pluralists point out that a significant share of the media market in the UK is taken up by PSB. e.g. BBC and Channel 4.

BBC has a legal obligation to provide specific services - to inform, to educate and to entertain the full audience spectrum (all groups of society must be catered for).

In 1999, the government outlined what it saw as the functions of the BBC:

- To provide quality programming with particular emphasis on giving audiences access to the 'arts' (drama, classical music)
- To protect vulnerable programme types such as news, documentaries, dramas and kids shows
- To accurately and impartially report news
- To educate audiences so that they can make informed decisions about political issues
- To ensure programming is pluralistic and diverse and caters for all audiences
- To protect consumers from harmful material, especially children.

Pluralists therefore see PSB as the perfect example (epitome) of impartial and objective media and a counterweight to any bias from the private sector.

State Controls

Pluralists say that the power of the media owners is restricted by state or government controls. In some societies, owners are not allowed to own too much media or different types of media in order to reduce the possibility that one person's view or products can become too dominant.

Another state constraint on media ownership is the fact that both the BBC and ITV have some legal requirements imposed upon by Ofcom - The office for communications.

Ofcom's functions is to monitor the content and quality of television and radio output on both the BBC and the commercial channels. They also review viewers and listeners complaints.

Pluralists argue that the combination of audience and regulators prevents media owners with no moral or ethical principles to produce biased content upon the general public.

Media Professionalism

Pluralists argue that journalists have too much integrity (the quality of possessing and steadfastly adhering to high moral principles or professional standards) to be biased regularly in favour of one perspective. Media also have a strong tradition of investigative journalism, they aim to expose the misdeeds of those in power.

Media Audiences

Pluralists suggest that audiences do not passively accept what is being fed to them. They argue that audiences are selective and often critical of media content. Audiences are very diverse and interpret media in different ways.

Marxist Critique of media ownership and control

Marxists argue that the economic system of the UK is unfair because it generally benefits the R/C at the expense of the W/C. The wealth of the R/C is obtained by exploiting the labour power of the W/C. The R/C is able to maintain class inequality is by inheritance and private education through the generations.

The role of ideology

Marxists suggest that the R/C uses ideology - false but influential set of ideas, values and norms, to make sure that the W/C accept capitalism and do not threaten its stability. They do this by dominating institutions such as the education system, religion and mass media.

The role of these ideological agencies is to transmit r/c ideology by persuading the majority that capitalist society is meretricious - if you work hard, you will be successful. These agencies therefore aim to convince people of the benefits of capitalism.

As a result, w/c people experience false class consciousness - coming to believe (wrongly) that capitalism is a fair system which benefits us all equally.

The media and ideology

Marxists believe that media owners aim to transmit a conservative and conformist ideology in the form of news and entertainment. The main function of media is to shape how we think about the world we live in.

The w/c are never encouraged to be critical of the capitalist system. Marxists argue that the owners of the media ensure we only get a narrow range of approved views. Other views which are critical are rarely heard.

Marxists argue that the media is happy to transmit r/c ideology through the TV and newspapers because media owners are part of the r/c.

Tunstall and Palmer (1991) argue along these lines with regard to government regulation of media conglomerates - a company that owns various types of media. They suggest that governments are no longer interested in controlling the activities of media owners.

The problem with the Marxist view is that it implies that all media owners and the political elite are united in some sort of ideological conspiracy to brainwash the population. However, sociologists only have anecdotal (second hand accounts rather than first-hand experience) evidence to confirm their suspicions that concentration of media ownership is damaging democracy.

Curran (2003) evidence for ideological nature of ownership and control

Curran's research on the concentration of British Press suggests that there is strong evidence of owner interference and manipulation.

He suggests that 4 periods can be seen with regard to owner intervention and the consequent undermining of journalistic and editorial integrity (professional standards of editors):

1920 to 1950

- The rise of the press barons
- Proprietorial control was the norm. e.g. Lord Beaverbrook and Northcliffe had control over their favourite newspaper in terms of layout and content. Beaverbrook "I run the Daily Express merely for the purpose of making propaganda and with no other motive"
- False class consciousness was probably not the ideological motive of the press barons but there was an ideological effect of owner interference in the media content - their main impact was the way their papers represented the world, this tended to strengthen the conservative views of their readers and reinforce oppression

1951 to 1974

- Curran argues this period was the great pluralist phase in terms of newspaper reporting because there was greater delegation by owners to editorial authority.
- Investigative reporting was at its height
- Curran argues that a group consensus (agreement) emerged among journalist and editors that owner influence should be resisted.
- But owners influence didn't disappear, most could still show that they supported a particular political party

1974 to 1992

- Curran argues that a new type of interventionist proprietorship appeared in this period - Rupert Murdoch
- He orientated towards what sold his newspapers rather than what helped party interests or ideological viewpoint. He shifted his papers to the right wing because he believed right wing policies were the key to making vast profits.

1997 to now

- Curran noted that media ownership in the past 10 years has been based on global conservatism.
- British newspapers have moved into the global marketplace.
- Rupert Murdoch was right winged but he instructed that his newspapers not to support the Conservatives and support Labour because he perceived Blair as the only credible conservative worth supporting.

Analysis/conclusion:

Curran noted that Pluralist and Marxists theories may have been mistaken in the way they look at media owners.

Pluralists - They view that the media owners do not intervene in media content, this is false as Curran argues that the last 10 years has seen greater intervention because owners have undermined newspaper independence and balance in subtle ways by choosing the editors they want and getting rid of editors that fail.

Marxists - They say that there is a deliberate capitalist conspiracy to subvert w/c consciousness. There is little evidence to support this. Curran suggests that media owners are not united in an ideological quest but are primarily motivated by economics rather than capitalist ideology.

Why should we study media control and ownership? Doyle (2002)

She suggests 2 reasons:

1. Societies need to have a diverse and pluralistic media provision so all views can be heard, abusers of power and elite can't control us.
2. Media is so influential, they have the power to make or break politicians careers. The media has considerable influence on public opinion

- Pluralists suggest that media owners manage their media in a responsible way, any attempt of owners trying to use their media to control it to voice their own view would be undermined by the public. The media is largely determined by their consumer market.

GLASGOW UNIVERSITY MEDIA GROUP

Curran's analysis fits in with the GUMP analysis - they take a hegemonic approach - domination by consent, used to describe the way the r/c project their view of the world so that it becomes the consensus view - to media ownership and control.

- **KEY POINT - The Glasgow University Media Group (GUMG)** suggests that media content does support the interests of those who run the capitalist system. However, this is an unintended by-product of the social backgrounds of journalists and broadcasters rather than a conscious capitalist conspiracy. The GUMG points out that most journalists working for national newspapers, television and radio tend to be overwhelmingly male, White, and middle class, e.g. 54% are privately educated.
- The GUMG claims that these journalists and broadcasters tend to believe in middle-of-the-road (consensus) views and ideas because these are generally unthreatening. Journalists believe that these appeal to the majority of their viewers, listeners and readers. Ideas outside this consensus are viewed by journalists as 'extremist'. People who hold these opinions are rarely invited to contribute their views in newspapers or on television, or if they are, they are ridiculed by journalists.
- The GUMG argues that these journalists are not motivated by a desire to defend capitalist interests. Media companies are profit-making businesses. Those who commission and plan programmes, or decide newspaper or magazine content, usually play safe by excluding anything that might offend or upset readers or viewers. Losing several thousand readers, or viewers, because they were offended by 'extreme' views and potentially losing millions of pounds in revenue and profit is too much of a risk.
- **Barnett and Weymour** argue that such decisions have had a negative cultural effect in the sense that education, information and news have been increasingly sidelined. They compared television schedules in 1978, 1988 and 1998 and argued that the evidence suggests that television in Britain has been significantly **dumbed down**, e.g. the number of one-off dramas and documentaries has halved, while soap operas and cheap reality shows have increased fivefold. There are also now more repeats and cheap American imports. Time allocated to news programming has fallen dramatically, and more time on serious news programmes is devoted to celebrity news and human interest stories. Barnett and Weymour note that even the BBC is succumbing to these commercial pressures. Furthermore, they conclude that despite having hundreds of television channels, we do not have more choice, just more of the same thing.

Agenda setting:

- **The result of this journalistic consensus, argues the GUMG, is that the media set the agenda and decide what issues are to be discussed by society. The GUMG argues that the media consequently present society with a fairly narrow agenda for discussion. Therefore agenda setting results in CULTURAL HEGEMONY.** The basic principles of capitalism – private enterprise, profit, the free market and the rights of property ownership – dominate media content and are presented as 'normal' and 'natural'. There is actually little choice for audiences in that there is no radical alternative to the mainstream newspapers and dissenting views on subjects like the monarchy are rarely presented.