



A-level sociology media revision notes

Social Science (King's College London)



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A Level Sociology Media Revision Notes

Written for the AQA Sociology Specification

Exam paper 7192 (2): Topics in Sociology

A Level Sociology of The Media – AQA Specification

The AQA says that students are expected to be familiar with sociological explanations of the following content:

- the new media and their significance for an understanding of the role of the media in contemporary society
- the relationship between ownership and control of the media
- the media, globalisation and popular culture
- the processes of selection and presentation of the content of the news
- media representations of age, social class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and disability
- the relationship between the media, their content and presentation, and audiences.

Sociology of Media: Revision Notes Specific Contents

The specific sections of this revision hand-out are derived from the above guidelines.

The New Media and their significance for an understanding of the role of the media in contemporary society

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1. The Main Characteristics of New Media

New media is a broad term referring to communications technologies such as the internet and social media which are digital and more interactive than traditional forms of media.

New media is digital

With the growth of digital technology in the 1990s, the vast majority of information is now converted, stored and transmitted as binary code (a series of 1s and 0s.). Qualitative information has today become 'digitalised'.

Digitalisation is what allows so much information to be stored in compact hard disks or micro memory cards and it is also what allows for the near instantaneous transmission of information via cable and satellite.

Digitalisation has also resulted in 'technological convergence', or the convergence of different forms of information (text, audio and visual) into one single 'system' - most web sites today offer a fusion of text and audio-visual information, and our mobile devices allow us to perform a variety of functions - not only reading text and watching/ listening to videos, but also searching for information, sending messages, shopping and using GPS functions.

Analogue is the opposite of digital. It is stored in physical form and examples include print newspapers, records, and old films and T.V. programmes stored on tape.

New media is characterised by interactivity

'Old media' tended to be very much a 'one way' affair, with audiences on the receiving end of broadcasts, for the most part able to do little else that just passively watch media content.

New Media however is much more of a two way affair and it allows consumers and users to get more involved.

Increased interactivity can be seen in simple acts such as liking a Facebook post or commenting on news piece or blog. However, some users get much more involved and create their own blogs and videos and actively upload their own content as 'prosumers'.

New Media seem to have fostered a more participatory culture, with more people involved and the roles between consumer and producer of media content becoming ever more blurred!

New media is hypertextual

Hypertext, or 'links' are a common feature of new media, which allows users more freedom of choice over how they navigate the different sources of information available to them.

In more technical terms, links in web sites offer non-sequential connections between all kinds of data facilitated by the computer. Optimists tend to see this feature as allowing for more individualised lifestyle choices, giving users the chance to act more independently, and to make the most of the opportunities new media markets make available to them.

Global Networks

Digital Media has also facilitated cultural globalisation - we now interact much more globally and via virtual networks of people rather than locally.

These networks allow for 'collective intelligence' to increase - they allow us to pool our resources much more easily and to draw on a wider range of talents and sources of information (depending on our needs) than ever before.

Virtual Worlds

New Media presents to us a very different reality from face to face to 'lived reality' - for most of us this means a very fast paced flow of information with numerous products and people screaming for our attention.

However, this situation has only existed since the mid 2000s, and it must be remembered that New Media reality is virtual reality. This is especially true when it comes to social media sites which give users the opportunity to present themselves in any way they see fit, and while most users don't go full Cat Fish, most people choose to present only one aspect of themselves.

Simulation

Simulation goes a step beyond the 'virtual' nature of New Media as usual. Simulation is most obviously experienced computer games which provide an immersive experience for users into a "virtual life" that is simulated through digital technology.

These virtual worlds are synthetic creations that ultimately rely on algorithms which set the parameters through which events in the gaming environment unfold.

Examples today include not only online RPG games, but also driving and flight simulations.

Source - Adapted from Martin Lister et al - New Media: A critical Introduction (Second Edition).

2. Who uses new media?

What are the patterns of new-media usage in the UK by age, social class and gender? Is there still a digital divide?

In 2019, almost nine in ten (87%) UK households had internet access, and adults who use the internet spent, on average, 3 hours 15 minutes a day online (in September 2018) (1)

Around 70% of UK adults have a social media account and about one in every five minutes spent online is on social media (1)

The number of households connected to the internet and the use of New Media has increased rapidly in the last decade, but statistics from OFCOM clearly show that there are still differences in new media usage by age, social class and gender.

The generation digital divide

New media usage varies significantly by age:

AGE 16-24s	45-54s:	55-64s:	AGE 75+
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 99% use a mobile phone • 79% watch on-demand or streamed content • 93% have a social media profile • 1% do not use the internet (2) • 47% play games online (4) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 98% use a mobile phone • 69% watch on-demand or streamed content • 76% have a social media profile • 7% do not use the internet (2) • 10% play online games (4) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 96% use a mobile phone • 43% watch on-demand or streamed content • 58% have a social media profile • 19% do not use the internet (2) • 5% play online games (4) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 81% use a mobile phone • 22% watch on-demand or streamed content • 20% have a social media profile • 48% do not use the internet (2) • 5% play games online (4)

The social class digital divide

Working-age adults in DE socio-economic group1 households are more than three times as likely as those in non-DE households to be non-users of the internet (14% vs. 4%). (1)

The contrast is best shown by comparing the highest socio-economic group (AB) with the lowest socio-economic group (DE)

Socio-Economic Group AB:	Socioeconomic Group DE:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 97% use a mobile phone• 73% watch on-demand or streamed content• 74% have a social media profile• 57% correctly identify advertising on Google• 6% do not use the internet (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 93% use a mobile phone• 46% watch on-demand or streamed content• 56% have a social media profile• 37% correctly identify advertising on Google• 23% do not use the internet (2)

The gender digital divide

- In 2017, women (81%) continue to be more likely to have a profile/ account, compared to men (74%). (4)
- Women are more likely than men to say they have ever seen content that upset or offended them in social media over the past year (58% vs. 51%). (4)
- (50%) of men say they are 'very' interested in the news (50%) compared to only a third (34%) of women. Twice as many women (15%) as men (8%) are not interested. (4)
- A quarter of men (24%) play games online, compared to 9% of women. (4)

Sources

1. OFCOM – Online Nation 2019 - https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0024/149253/online-nation-summary.pdf
2. OFCOM – Media Use and Attitudes Report 2019 - https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0021/149124/adults-media-use-and-attitudes-report.pdf
3. OFCOM's [Interactive data link](#).
4. https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0011/113222/Adults-Media-Use-and-Attitudes-Report-2018.pdf

3. The neophilic perspective on new media

Neophiliacs argue that the internet and social media have been beneficial to society and individuals. New Media have created more opportunities for individuals to find information, offered individuals greater choice and freedom, provided new ways for people to interact with each other, resulted in more people challenging the powerful and increased economic growth.

Easy access to more information and advice

The internet makes it very easy to access a wide variety of information about almost anything, often for free. Some of the more obvious examples here include Wikipedia, instructional videos on YouTube and various blogs where many experts will provide their expertise for free.

24 hour news coverage from a variety of sources and the option to switch on instant notifications also makes it very easy to stay in touch with what's occurring in the world.

It is also increasingly possible to 'hack' an education online, as many colleges and universities post their learning materials for free (often lectures on YouTube) and there are various blogs around in which people have put together syllabuses which link to free information.

The internet also makes it easier for people to seek confidential advice and support for sensitive issues such as mental health issues, abuse and addiction.

Greater individual freedom and choice

Social media allow people the chance to construct new online identities and give them greater freedom to express themselves than ever before. Online, individuals can experiment with new identities in the comfort of anonymity and expand their personal boundaries.

Social media and blogs have proven to be an accessible way for marginalised or disadvantaged peoples to find a voice – there are many active LGBT and disabled bloggers for example.

New social networks and global connections

The internet has blurred the boundaries between the local and the global, resulting in the emergence of a 'new global village', with more daily communicative interactions occurring now than ever in human history.

The global internet makes it easier for individuals to make new global connections that wouldn't be possible just at the local level or through traditional (one-way) media – as a result of social media sites like Facebook there are now thousands of new 'tribes' with millions of people interacting on a daily basis.

Social media apps also make it easier for families and friends to stay in touch anywhere in the world, and while nothing new, this opens up the possibility for people to move to other places yet still stay connected.

Challenging power and revitalising democracy

The internet allows people to access a wide variety of political opinions and commentary and to easily 'fact check' what politicians are saying, making it easier to hold those with political power to account.

There are thousands of blogs which voice radical political opinions which challenge the dominant mainstream neoliberal voice in the mainstream news.

The internet has also provided a platform for many social movements and allowed them to expand the reach of their voice and activism. Extinction Rebellion is one of the best recent examples of this, with many of their protests being organised via social media.

All of these points apply equally as well to holding corporate as well as political power to account.

The growth of E-commerce

The internet has made it very easy to buy all sorts of goods and services, and at very cheap prices if you shop via the largest sites such as Amazon.

Comparison sites allow people to easily compare the costs of utilities and other services, and to easily switch to the best deal, which is empowering for consumers.

Finally, the internet has also allowed thousands of people to set up or enhance their business – by selling goods and services online.

4. The cultural pessimist view of the new media

Cultural pessimists point to the possible downsides of the new media such as the rise of Fake News, domination of a few media companies, the rise of echo-chambers, the reinforcing of elite power and increasing commercialisation.

More information is not necessarily a good thing

There may be more information, more news channels and blogs, but a lot this is just copied and modified slightly or recycled from other places.

Some of the information online may just be 'fake news' – deliberately misleading to serve political or corporate ends. The Vote Leave campaign is a good example of this.

More information sources make it more difficult to verify the sources of information, and this is not always possible (in which case you should not use the information!)

information overload may be a problem – having too much data too deal with.

Constant news feeds can lead to us just being 'distracted by the new' rather than taking the time to look at one thing in depth. We end up with a shallower understanding of the world as a result.

Domination by media conglomerates

Pessimists argue that rather than the internet being a free space which allows for the free development of individual expression, it has come to be controlled by a handful of big tech companies – namely Amazon, Google, Apple and Facebook.

These companies have invested hugely in New Media in the last decade and they now control not only access to social media sites but also search engines and the web servers which store our information.

There are examples of people being de-platformed without warning or reason on YouTube and Twitter – typically those who hold radical views, suggesting these companies determine who can express what on social media.

So marginalised groups might be able to blog and have a say, but you'll only be able to find them if these companies allow you!

Echo Chambers etc...

Social Media has led to more polarisation and conflict - Social networks are increasingly isolated from each other into 'bubbles' or 'echo chambers' – people find other people with the same views as them and they all follow each other and just reinforce their own views of the world. People are now less likely to see views which challenge their own. As a result, we have a polarisation of opinion. The case of Brexit is a great example of this.

As well as allowing for ordinary people to connect with each other globally, the internet also makes it easier for organised crime networks to commit phishing (mass emails) and to sell drugs online, among other crimes.

Groups like Fortean are also a good example of the downside of online global communities – largely anonymous groups who organised collective trolling and hacking just for the lols.

Reinforcing Elite Power

Mainstream political parties now run sophisticated advertising campaigns using big data to manipulate the public into voting for them: Trump's campaign and the Brexit campaign are two examples of this.

Larger political parties and corporations have more money to spend on advertising to keep their biased information at the top of internet search engines such as Google.

The most radical views are censored - while individuals may be free to express any opinion online, some of the most radical have de-platformed.

Politics is much less visible than entertainment on the internet – suggesting critical political thought is 'drowned out' more than ever

Surveillance – the ex-CIA analyst claimed in 2015 that the British security services had the technology to access the information stored on people's smartphones.

Increasing consumption and commercialisation

The internet seems to have turned into a sphere of consumption, where most of what we see is aimed at selling us something. It is hard to read some news sites, such as The Independent, because of the sheer amount of space devoted to advertising.

Companies such as Amazon use the data we collect to find out our preferences and sell it to advertising companies, so they can target ads at users more effectively, thus manipulating them to buy products they wouldn't normally buy – it's estimated that 1/3rd of all Amazon purchase are a result of 'recommendations' for example.

5. Defining and measuring the concentration of media ownership

Concentration of media ownership is the trend towards fewer individuals and/ or companies owning a higher proportion of the media.

Increasing concentration of ownership has long been a concern of sociologists. For example, in 2004 Bagdikian pointed out the following trend towards increasing ownership of the media:

- In 1983, 50 corporations controlled the majority of news media in the USA
- By 1992, 22 companies owned and operated 90% of the mass media

By 2014, United States media ownership was concentrated mainly in the hands of six companies: Comcast, Disney, 21st Century Fox/ News Corporation, Time Warner and Viacom

In the United Kingdom in 2017 10 companies received 70% of the revenue generated by all media companies, and 40 companies received 92% of all of the revenue (source: [Deloitte media metrics, 2017](#)).

How do we measure concentration of ownership of media?

Looking at revenue share as the above examples do is only one way of measuring concentration of ownership, however, there are several other ways concentration may be occurring which are not measured simply by looking at how revenue is distributed....

Vertical Integration

Where one company owns all of the stages of production of media products - for example a company owning a film production studio, and the cinema where the film is shown.

Horizontal integration

Where one company diversifies to own more types of media - e.g. when a film production company also gets into book publishing.

Lateral expansion or diversification

When media companies branch out into non media areas - e.g. Virgin Media getting into trains and insurance.

Global Conglomeration

Where companies in one country buy up companies in other countries. News Corp, for example, owns media outlets in several different countries.

Synergy

Where a media product is sold in several different forms - often as a form of marketing. For example, a company produces a film for cinema, then a DVD, a T.V. spin off series, a sound track for download, maybe a cartoon strip and some action figures too.

Technological convergence

Where traditional media companies link with IT companies to make sure their media products are available across several different devices.

Final thoughts

Intuitively it seems likely that there is increasing concentration of ownership, especially with the rise of Facebook, Google, Amazon and Apple, but at the same time it is difficult to say for certain given the complexity of the concept of concentration of ownership

6. The Pluralist Theory of Ownership and Control of Media

Pluralists argue that power in democratic, free market societies is spread out among diverse competing interest groups, and not concentrated in the hands of a minority economic elite, as Marxists suggest. According to pluralists, no one group has a monopoly on power and their view of the media reflects their view of power in society more generally.

Media content is driven by profit

Pluralists argue that in democratic, free market economies different media companies must compete for customers, and so they must provide the kind of content those customers want in order to make a profit and survive. If a company fails to provide the kind of news and entertainment that people need and want, customers will simply stop buying their media products and go elsewhere, forcing that company out of business.

It follows that control over media content ultimately lies with consumers, not the owners of media, because the owners need to adapt their content to fit the demands of the consumers.

Media owners primarily want to make money and so they would rather adapt their media content to be more diverse and keep money coming in, rather than use their media channels to publish their own narrower subjective views and opinions.

Media content thus doesn't reflect the biased, one sided views of media owners, it reflects the diverse opinions of the general public who ultimately pay for that media content. The public (being diverse) generally don't want one-sided, biased media.

Pluralists argue that media ownership has become more concentrated in recent years for economic reasons, rather than political or ideological reasons. For example, vertical and horizontal integration save a media company money because they no longer need to contract out to external companies.

Consumers determine content

From the pluralist perspective audiences are active rather than passive and not easily manipulated. They are free to select, reject and re-interpret a wide range of media content, and they increasingly take advantage of new technologies and new media to produce their own content.

It is thus ultimately the consumers of media/ the wider audience who determine media content rather than the media owners.

Journalists are not controlled by owners

Finally, pluralists point out that on a purely practical level media owners of large global corporations cannot personally determine the content of all their media products, there are too many products and too many global-level management issues to keep them occupied. Thus producers, editors and journalists have considerable freedom to shape media content, free from the control of the big bosses.

Criticisms of Pluralism

- Ultimately it is still owners who have the power to hire and fire journalists and they do have the power to select high level editors who have similar views to themselves, which may subtly influence the media agenda.
- It still requires a lot of money to establish a large media company, and ownership remains very concentrated. There is relatively little journalism which is both independent and widely consumed.
- Owners, editors and most journalists share an upper middle-class background and a conservative worldview.
- The pressure to maintain profits has led to narrowing of media content – more towards uncritical, sensationalist entertainment and less likely to be critical and independent.

7. The Instrumentalist Marxist Theory of Ownership and Control of Media

Marxist Instrumentalist theory argues that media owners control media content, and that the media performs ideological functions. The primary role of the media is to keep a largely passive audience from criticizing capitalism and thus maintain the status quo.

Marxist Instrumentalist Theory is also known as the Traditional Marxist or Manipulative Approach to the media.

Media owners control media content

Media owners are part of the ruling class elite and they consciously manipulate media content to transmit a conservative ideology to control the wider population and maintain their wealth and privilege.

The content of the media is thus narrow and biased and reflects the opinions of the ruling class generally and the media owners in particular.

The government does not effectively regulate media content because the political elite are also part of the ruling class like the media owners.

The media performs ideological functions

According to Instrumentalist Marxists, the primary role of the media is to spread ruling class ideology and maintain the status quo, keeping the current unequal capitalist system in place.

The media performs ideological functions in many ways:

1. We see many favourable representations of (rather than critical commentary on) the wealthy - for example Royalty, millionaires on Cribs, and middle-class lifestyles more generally in programmes such as 'Escape to the Country' and 'Antiques Road Trip'.
2. Some shows spread the 'myth of meritocracy' - Dragons Den and The Apprentice are two wonderful contemporary examples of this.
3. The News often dismisses radical view points as extremist, dangerous or silly, and a conservative (ruling class) view of the world as normal.
4. Negative portrayals of ethnic minorities and immigrants serve to divide the ruling class and discourage criticism of the ruling class.
5. Entertainment distracts the public from thinking critically about important political issues.

The audience are passive

Marxist instrumentalists see the audience as a mass of unthinking robots who are passive and easily manipulate. They essentially take what they see in the media at face value and believe what they see without questioning it.

Supporting evidence for Instrumentalist Marxism

- Control by owners was most obvious in the era of the Press Barons in the early part of the 20th century, when some even said that they used their newspapers to consciously spread their political views.
- Rupert Murdoch's control of his News Corporation since the 1970s is another good example of an owner controlling media content. All of his newspapers have historically had a strong right-wing point of view, which reflects his values.
- A specific example of Murdoch's control is that all of his news outlets supported the Iraq War in 2003, a war which he personally supported. It's unlikely that all the editors of all his newspapers globally shared this view.

Criticisms of Instrumentalist Marxism

Pluralists are the biggest critics of Manipulative Marxists.

- It is impractical for media owners of large corporations to control all output on a day to day basis. At some point they must trust editors.
- Pluralists argue that media owners are primarily motivated by making a profit and thus would rather provide audiences with the diverse content they want rather than use their media companies to spread their own narrow view of the world.
- The previous criticism follows on from the Pluralist view that audiences are not just passive and unthinking, they are active and critical, and thus not easily manipulated: they can easily choose to switch off if they don't like what they see.
- The rise of the New Media especially undermines the Manipulative approach - New Media encourage audiences to be more active and allows for a greater range of people to produce and share media content. It's simply not possible for owners to control such content.

8. The Neo-Marxist Theory of the Ownership and Control of Media

Neo Marxists argue that cultural hegemony explains why we have a limited media agenda.

Journalists have more freedom than traditional Marxists suggest, and the media agenda is not directly controlled by owners. However, journalists share the world view of the owners and use gatekeeping and agenda setting to keep items which are harmful to elites out of the media agenda and thus voluntarily spread the dominant ideology.

Neo-Marxists emphasise cultural hegemony

Hegemony is where the norms and values of the ruling class are taken as common sense.

According to Neo-Marxists, the reason why we have a limited media agenda is because of cultural hegemony, not because of direct control by wealthy media owners. In other words, cultural factors are more important than economic factors in explaining narrow media content.

Simply put, Journalists have accepted the conservative worldview of the ruling class as common sense, and they share this world view with the ruling class – they thus unconsciously spread the dominant ideology themselves without the need for direct control by the media owners.

Journalists voluntarily spread the dominant ideology

Journalists have the freedom to report as they please, so other factors besides economic control/ ownership determine media content, factors such as the interests of journalists and industry news values.

HOWEVER, the broad agenda of the media is still limited because the journalists share the same world view as the ruling class and the owners (this is known as ‘cultural hegemony’).

This is at least partly because Journalists are themselves mostly white and middle class, with more than 50% of them having gone to private schools. They thus present a conservative/ neo-liberal view of the world on autopilot.

Also, journalists do not want to risk their careers by annoying owners and so are reluctant to publish content which might annoy owners.

Agenda setting and gate keeping

Agenda setting and gatekeeping are the two processes through which journalists limit media content. They are normally used in relation to the selection and presentation of The News.

Gatekeeping = the process of choosing which items are selected for coverage, and others are kept out.

Agenda setting = deciding how media items are going to be framed, for example, who is going to be invited to discuss topics and what kind of questions are going to be asked.

According to neo-Marxists gatekeeping and agenda setting tend to result in issues which are harmful to the elite being kept out of the media, thus reinforcing the dominant ideology.

Examples of agenda-setting and gatekeeping include:

9. Only having two political parties discuss a news item – we rarely hear from the Green Party, for example.
10. Focussing on the violence at riots and protests, rather than the issues which are being protested about, or the cause of the riots.
11. The news taking the side of the police and the government, rather than hearing from criminals or terrorists.

Criticisms of Neo-Marxism

- Traditional Marxists argue that it underestimates the important of economic factors, for example the power of owners to hire and fire journalists
- As with traditional Marxism, the role of new media may make this perspective less relevant. It is now much harder to maintain the dominant ideology, for example.
- Pluralists point out that this perspective still tends to assume the audience are passive and easily swayed by the dominant ideology. In reality, the audience may be more active and critical.

9. The postmodern perspective on globalisation and popular culture

Postmodernists see the media as central to globalisation. They generally see globalisation as inevitable and emphasise the positive effects media globalisation has had on society.

More individual choice

The globalisation of the media means that people are now more aware of hundreds of diverse cultures all over the world, and this gives them more inspiration to break with their own local traditions and live the lives they choose to.

There are also many more consumption opportunities: more choice of films, music, travel opportunities and of course global products.

The boundary between high and popular culture has also blurred: some classical music artists have sought out popular audiences for example, making high culture more accessible to the masses.

Finally, there are more opportunities for individuals to express themselves via social media.

The rejection of metanarratives

Postmodernists argue that media saturation means there are now an incredibly diverse array of voices and opinions online.

This array challenges traditional 'metanarratives' – or any viewpoint which holds that there is one truth – as is found with traditional religions, political ideologies such as Marxism and science.

As a result of media saturation, people are now more sceptical of the 'truth claims' of experts, which means it is harder for those with power to manipulate people because 'they know better'.

Participatory culture

Audiences are now more involved with the creation of media content, so the global media space is now more participatory than old style one-way media.

Many people create and upload their own content to platforms such as YouTube, or write blogs, or spend time maintaining their social media profiles.

Audiences also contribute by sharing and critiquing other people's content on social media.

The globalisation of protest

New media has been used effectively to fight oppression.

Spencer-Thomas (2008) conducted an analysis of protests against military violence in Burma – he found that in 1998 very little media attention was received, but that by 2007, once Smart Phones had penetrated the country, widespread global media coverage of the protests was achieved.

Some political campaigners have also used Twitter and Facebook to fight oppression – during the Arab Spring for example. Another example is the use of Facebook by Saudi women campaigning for the right to drive.

Cultural hybridity

Thompson (1995) argues that global media products are modified by local cultures which results in various new hybrid forms. Bollywood is a good example of this.

10. The cultural imperialist perspective on globalisation and popular culture

Cultural imperialists tend to see globalisation as a one-way process, mainly involving the spread of American power and values to other parts of the world. The cultural imperialist perspective focuses on the negative effects which media globalisation has on local populations.

It is a Marxist theory, aligned with the neo-Marxist perspective of ownership and control and the cultural effects theory of audience effects.

Global media keeps capitalism going

It does in three main ways:

- By generating false needs, mainly through advertising - which encourages people to see relatively high levels of consumption as the norm.
- Through encouraging conspicuous consumption - the wide circulation of programmes about the wealthy mean people tend to think the average level of consumption is higher than the real-world norm.
- Through commodity fetishism - especially relevant in the age of new media: people increasingly tend to see their smartphones as extensions of themselves, for example.

Media globalisation is Americanisation

Americanisation is a process where America imposes its cultural products on other nations and local cultures. There are several examples of this - Hollywood movies, various sitcoms, sporting events but also advertising.

Cultural imperialists see the effects of Americanisation as being negative. They argue it results in the erosion of local cultures and traditions – for example when children around the world increasingly choose American fast foods over locally produced and cooked foods.

McDonaldization is also part of cultural globalisation - working practices become more rationalised, and more focussed on standardised ways of working to promote efficiency of production.

Finally, it can also be argued that Americanization has resulted in a backlash against American culture, as with the rise of Fundamentalism.

The political consequences of Americanisation

As with the economic and cultural aspects of globalisation, cultural imperialists also see the political consequences of globalisation/ Americanisation in negative terms.

The spread of data surveillance threatens democracy as governments increasingly use social media data to manipulate populations to vote as they want them to.

Finally, the use of Smartphones has a 'dumbing down' effects, as people are constantly distracted by waves of trivial information.

11. News as a 'window on the world' vs the social construction of the News

According to all the sociologists in this section of the course, the news is a socially manufactured product, rather than an objective 'window on the world'.

Many events happen in reality which do not get reported and those which do appear in the news are placed in a particular order of priority and 'framed' by the questions which are asked, and by who is asked to comment on the events.

It follows that the content and format of the news is a result of many decisions made by several media professionals and those they work with and that the news will thus reflect the biases of those who are involved in its creation.

'The News is Socially Constructed' = the news is a manufactured product, the result of decisions made by media professionals about what to include and how to present what is included.

Below is a brief introduction to the factors which influence news content, including news values, organisational routines, media owners and the background of journalists. Many of these factors are covered in greater depth further on in this revision guide.

News Values

News Values are general guidelines which determine how newsworthy an event is. The more news values an event has, then the more prominence the event will be given in a news programme or a newspaper.

Examples of News Values include:

- **Extraordinariness** - how unusual an event is. An event which is not routine and unexpected is more likely to be included in the news.
- **Threshold** - the bigger an event, the more likely it is to be included - e.g. more deaths are better.
- **Negativity** - generally war, violence, death, tragedy, all are more newsworthy than happy events.
- **Unambiguity** - the simpler, the more 'black and white' an event, the more likely it is to be included in the news agenda.
- **Personalisation** - if a story can be linked to an individual, and a personal story made out of it, then it is more newsworthy.

Organisational or Bureaucratic routines

These are logistical factors which can limit what events are included as news items and include:

- Financial costs
- Deadlines
- Time and Space
- The audience
- Journalistic ethics

Economic factors and ownership

[Instrumentalist Marxists](#) argue that owners can influence content, and a good example of this is the control Rupert Murdoch exerted over the reporting of the Iraq war in 2003 - he was for the war and his newspapers did not criticise it.

Advertising can also affect the news agenda – 'independent' news companies are dependent on advertising revenue, so they are unlikely to report on issues which are critical of capitalism and economic growth.

There is a hierarchy of credibility - the news generally presents the views of the elite and wealthy first and then the radicals and critics in response, suggesting the elite view is the norm.

Most Journalists are middle class

More than 50% of journalists were educated in private schools, and most of the rest come from middle class backgrounds.

This means they share a middle class 'establishment' view of the world and will see middle class issues as more significant than working class interests, and/ or present the interests of the middle classes as being the interests of everyone.

12. Organisational Routines and News Content

Organisational routines may affect what items are selected for presentation in the news. These include factors such as financial costs, time and space available, deadlines, immediacy and accuracy, the audience and journalistic ethics.

Organisational routines are sometimes known as bureaucratic routines.

Financial costs

News gathering can be an expensive business, and investigative journalism and overseas reporting are two of the most expensive types of news to produce: the former involves sustained long-term investigation and the latter involves overseas expenses.

Financial pressures have led to news companies changing the type of news they produce, with two major consequences:

Firstly, investigative journalism has declined, and that which remains has become more about digging up dirt on celebrities rather than in-depth exposés on corrupt politicians or corporations.

Secondly, the news has become more about infotainment – entertainment has become increasingly important as a factor in the selection of news items. Entertaining items achieve larger audiences which means more advertising revenue and more income.

Even the BBC isn't immune from these pressures. OFCOM recently said of BBC News that it is 'More Madonna than Mugabe'.

Time and space available

News has to be tailored to fit the time and space available in the newspaper or on the television show.

For example, A typical 6 O'clock BBC news show consists of around 15 items in 25 minutes, usually with each item taking up five minutes or less, and if an item can't be covered in this short period of time, it is more likely that it will not be included in the news agenda.

These small time slots also limit the number of perspectives which can be given on a news item – often restraining commentary to two people, and contributing to biased Agenda Setting (according to Neo-Marxists).

Longer news programmes allow for more in-depth coverage of news items.

Deadlines

This only really affects newspapers: the deadline for something to reach tomorrow's newspaper is around 10PM the previous evening.

Immediacy and Accuracy

An item is more likely to be included in the news if it can be accompanied by live footage and if relevant people can be found to comment on the issue or offer soundbites.

The audience

The content of the news may change because of the perceived characteristics of the audience.

For example, The Sun is aimed at less well educated people while The Guardian is aimed at people with a higher level of education.

The content of day time news may change to reflect the interests of stay at home parents.

Journalistic ethics

Ethics should constrain the type of news stories which are reported, and the way in which news is reported.

All UK newspapers sign up to the Press Complaints Commission's voluntary code of conduct which stipulates that journalists should avoid publishing inaccurate information and misrepresenting people and should respect people's privacy and dignity.

However, there is some evidence that journalists do not always act ethically. For example, the News of the World phone hacking scandal in the early 2000s – the paper hacked various celebrities and royals' phones as well as those of victims of the July 2005 London bombings.

The Leveson report (2012) found that news stories frequently relied on misrepresentation and embellishment, and it seems that press watchdogs have little power to enforce journalistic ethics today.

13. The Marxist Perspective on the News

Marxists suggest that the news agenda is heavily interests by those with power in capitalist societies and that the content of the news reflects the worldview and interests of the elite and middle classes.

Those working for mainstream news media may claim that the news they construct is objective and unbiased, but this is a myth according to Marxists, and the news primarily serves to legitimate capitalism and maintain the status quo.

Owners influence content

Owners may not be able to shape the day to day content of the news, especially live 24 hour news, but they can shape the broader context by setting the policies of their companies and influencing the general approach to selecting and editing news.

Owners the power to hire and fire Chief Executive Officers and other high-ranking officials, and they can exercise direct control over such decisions because they do not have to be made that often.

According to Marxist theory, owners will generally appoint senior officials who share their ideology and then lower ranking media professionals will avoid publishing content that might annoy them for fear of their jobs.

The news agenda legitimates a capitalist, neoliberal view of the world

News companies rely on advertisers for their income and so it should be no surprise that the news does not generally critique the capitalist system, in fact it does quite the opposite.

Most news programmes and papers have large sections devoted to business news and economics, where Corporate leaders and business experts are generally deferred to and are favourably presented.

These sections of the news rarely challenge the concept of economic growth, it is taken for granted as a universal 'good', and elsewhere the news rarely focuses on issues of poverty and inequality.

The hierarchy of credibility

Journalists rank people in elite and professional positions as being more credible sources of authority than those lower down the social class order.

Heads of companies, government officials, the police and academic experts are all more likely to be invited to comment on news items than those from pressure groups, less popular political parties, or just ordinary members of the general public.

The elite thus end up becoming the 'primary definers' of the news agenda.

The news often reports on what such people think of events, rather than the events themselves, so we end up with an elite/ middle class frame of the world through the news.

The class background of journalists

GUMG argue that media professionals tend to side with the elite because they share a middle-class background with them, and thus a worldview.

News items thus tend to represent the elite and middle classes more favourably than the working classes.

Fiske (1987) for example found that news reports on industrial disputes tended to report on managers as 'asking' whereas trades unionists tended to be reported as 'making demands', presenting the former as more reasonable.

14. Moral Panics and the Media

A moral panic is an exaggerated outburst of public concern over the morality or behaviour of a group in society.

Moral Panic Theory is strongly related to labelling theory, in fact moral panic theory is really labelling theory applied to the media – instead of the agent of social control doing the labelling, it is the media.

Two related key terms include folk devils and deviancy amplification.

A **folk devil** is the subject of a moral panic – the group who the media is focussing on, the group who is being targeted for exaggerated reporting.

Deviancy Amplification is one of the alleged consequences of a moral panic – it is where a group becomes more deviant as a result of media exaggeration of their deviance. It is very similar to the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy.

As with just about anything in life, all of this is much easier to understand with an example:

Stan Cohen's (1972) study of the Mods and Rockers

Stan Cohen's (1972) first developed the concept of the 'moral panic' in his study of the relationship between the media and the Mods and Rockers in the 1960s.

The Mods and Rockers were two working class youth subcultures, the mods famously riding scooters and dressing in smart clothes such as suits, and the rockers riding larger motorbikes and dressing in leathers.

These were also two of the first youth subcultures in consumer society, and initially they existed peacefully side by side – they were really just about style and music and the members of each were primarily concerned with having a good time.

However, during one bank holiday weekend in Clacton in 1964, where both mods and rockers visited to party, there were some minor acts of Vandalism and some violence between the two groups, this then led to the media turning up at the next big Bank Holiday weekend in Brighton (also 1964) 'ready' to report on any disturbances.

Once again at Brighton there was also some minor vandalism and violence between the mods and rockers, but this time the media were present and produced (according to Cohen) some extremely exaggerated reports about the extent of the violence between the two groups.

This had the effect of generating concern amongst the general public and the police then responded to this increased public fear and perceived threat to social order by policing future mods and rockers

events more heavily and being more likely to arrest youths from either subculture for deviant behaviour (whether violent or not).

A further consequence of the exaggerated media reporting was that the mods and rockers came to see themselves as opposed to each other, something which hadn't been the case before the media exaggeration.

Some further examples of moral panics

There have been several examples of issues which might be regarded as Moral Panics:

- Inner city mugging by black youths, as outlined by Stuart Hall in Policing the Crisis
- Punks and Skinheads
- Football Hooligans
- Paedophiles
- Islamic Terrorists
- Benefit Culture

NB all of the above examples are only 'possible' examples of moral panics, see criticisms below.

Criticisms of moral panic theory

Cohen's formulation of moral panic theory assumes that the audience are passive, but audiences today are much more active and able to critically evaluate media content, which means moral panics are less likely.

Thornton (1995) found that the media failed to generate a moral panic over rave culture, mainly because youth culture had become mainstream by that point, as had the taking of drugs such as ecstasy.

There are various reasons why 'panics' may not occur even if the media exaggerate the deviance of some groups – the media also exaggerate the police's ability to deal with deviance and exaggerated reporting of deviance is so common these days that people are just desensitised to its effects.

Finally, some concerns which some may call moral panics may be legitimate – such as concerns over child abuse or rising knife crime today.

15. Media representations of social class

The Monarchy

According to Nairn (2002) after WWII the monarchy developed close ties with the media industry and worked with them to reinvent itself as 'the royal family' and since then they have been represented in the media as a family that are 'like us but not like us', and the narrative of their lives is presented as a soap opera, and is part of our day to day media fabric, which encourages us to identify with the royals.

Media representations of royalty also reinforce a sense of national identity: The Queen is the ultimate figure head of the country and royal events form part of our annual calendar, as well as the fact that royals are often in attendance at other national events, such as sporting events for example.

Media representations of wealth

The very wealthy are generally represented positively in the media, for example Alan Sugar and the Dragons on Dragons Den.

The constant media focus on the lifestyles of wealthy celebrities tends to glamourize such lifestyles, suggesting this is something we should all be aspiring to, rather than focussing on the injustice of how much these people are paid compared to ordinary people.

The Middle Classes

Middle Class (higher income) families seem to be over-represented on daytime T.V. especially – in shows such as homes under the hammer, escape to the country and antiques shows featuring typically very high wealth/ income families, and yet presenting them as 'the norm'.

Most T.V. presenters are middle class, and so they are more likely to identify with middle class guests compared to working class guests, reinforcing the concerns of former as more worthy of attention.

Most journalists and editors are privately educated which means that the news agenda is framed from a middle-class point of views.

The working classes

There are relatively few shows which focus on the reality of the lives of working-class people.

Mainstream soaps tend to be the most watched representations of the working classes

Jones (2011) suggests the working classes are represented as feckless racists who hate immigration and multiculturalism – coverage of Brexit seems to offer support for this.

The underclass

Coverage tends to focus on the poverty of individuals rather than the structural features of society such as government policy which created the underclass.

Media coverage of the underclass is generally negative, and they are often scapegoated for societies' problems. Benefits Street is a good example of this.

16. Media representations of women

Women have historically been under-represented and mis-represented in stereotypical roles within mainstream media. This section focuses on symbolic annihilation, the cult of femininity and the male gaze as examples of this.

Under-representation and symbolic annihilation

Gaye Tuchman (1978) developed the concept of Symbolic Annihilation to refer to the under-representation of women in a narrow range of social roles, while men were represented in a full range of social and occupational roles.

Tuchman also argued that women's achievements were often not reported or trivialised and often seen as less important than things like their looks

According to Tuchman, women were often represented in roles linked to gender stereotypes, particularly those related to housework and motherhood – a good example of this being washing powder advertisements in which mothers and small daughters are working together, while men and boys are the ones covered in mud.

Ferguson (1980) conducted a content analysis of women's magazines from the end of WWII to 1980 and found that representations were organised around what she called the cult of femininity, based on traditional, stereotypical female roles and values: caring for others, family, marriage, and concern for appearance.

Ferguson noted that teenage magazines aimed at girls did offer a broader range of female representations, but there was still a focus on him, home and looking good for him.

A good (historical?) example of symbolic annihilation is the representation of women's sport. The Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation (2006) found that there was little coverage of women's sport, but what little coverage there was had a tendency to trivialise, sexualise and devalue women's sporting achievements.

Misrepresentations (myths and stereotypes)

In 'The Mouse that Roared' Henry Giroux argued that women were represented in a narrow, restricted and distorted range of roles.

Supporting evidence for Giroux lies in the historical representation of female characters in Disney Films – where the typical female character is a sexualised yet delicate princess who needs to be rescued by a stronger male character.

Examples of where Disney reinforces female stereotypes include:

- Snow White – who cleans the house of the male Dwarves and is eventually rescued by a male prince because she is pretty.
- Beauty and the Beast – In which Belle endures an abusive and violent beast in order to redeem him.
- Ariel – who gives up her voice to win the prince with her body.
- Mulan – who wins the war almost single handed only to return home to be romanced

Laura Mulvey 'The Male Gaze'

Laura Mulvey studied cinema films and developed the concept of the Male Gaze to describe how the camera lens eyed up the female characters for the sexual viewing pleasure of men.

The Male Gaze occurs when the camera focusses on women's bodies, especially breasts, bums and things, and spends too long lingering on these areas when it isn't necessary.

The male gaze of the camera puts the audience in the perspective of the heterosexual men – woman are displayed as a sexual object for both the characters in the film and the spectator – thus the man emerges as the dominant force and the woman is passive under the active (sexual) gaze of the man.

The overall effect of this is that women become objectified as sex objects, rather than being represented as whole people.

Mulvey argued that the Male Gaze occurred in film because heterosexual men were in control of the camera.

Changes to the representations of women?

The roles of women in society have changed considerably since these historical analyses of women's representations: since the 1970s women now occupy a much wider range of roles and equality with men.

David Gauntlett in 'Media Gender and Identity' argues that there has been an increase in the diversity of representations and roles of women in the media since the 1970s, and a corresponding decrease in stereotypical representations, which broadly reflects wider social changes.

The representation of women in films

There have been several films in recent decades with 'strong' lead female characters who are fierce, tough and resourceful, and thus arguably subvert hegemonic concepts of masculinity.

Arguably a watershed moment in this was the 1979 film 'Alien' in which the female lead character Ripley outlives her male colleagues and ultimately kills the Alien threat.

Since then a number of female heroines have featured as the lead characters in various action movies such Terminator 2, the Tomb Raider films, Kill Bill, and The Hunger Games.

However, rather than subverting hegemonic concepts of masculinity, it could be argued that such films still perpetuate the 'beauty myth' as all the above lead female characters are slim and attractive.

The Bechdel Test

The [Bechdel Test](#) is a simple test which presents a quantitative analysis of the representation of women in relation to men in film. To pass the test a film has to pass three tests...

1. It has to have at least two (named) women in it
2. Who talk to each other
3. About something other than a man

The website above allows you to search for films which passed the test by year, and there is clear evidence that female characters are more visible and independent year on year, but there are still many films which do not pass this simple basic test.

The representation of women in Game of Thrones

At first glance, there seem to be a number of positive female characters in Game of Thrones – the assassin and ultimate killer of the Ice King Arya Stark being the most stand-out example, with other positive female characters including Daenerys Targaryen, Cersei Lannister, Brienne of Tarth, Sansa Stark (once she gets through her abusive relationship).

However, various feminist commentators have argued that all of these positive representations are let down by the end of series eight with Brienne falling apart emotionally because of her love for Jamie Lannister, Daenerys literally going mad, Sansa apparently being strong because of her previous abusive relationship (rather than in spite of it), and with all the anonymous women cowering in the crypt during the battle with the Ice King, while all the anonymous men are outside fighting.

A further Feminist argument is that all of these women are portrayed as strong individuals who are strong because they adopt male characteristics, and ultimately it is male violence which wins the day rather than more diverse forms of feminine power.

The Cosmo effect

McRobbie argued that since the 1980s the magazine Cosmopolitan has featured positive representations of young women as seeking to control their own lives rather than being dependent on men.

McRobbie argues that Cosmopolitan thus challenges the cult of traditional notions of femininity as women are no longer portrayed as the weaker sex.

The representations of women in the news

In 2015 the Global Media Monitoring group conducted quantitative content analysis of 1960 sources covering 431 announcers and reporters.

They found that:

- The overall presence of women as sources was 28%.
- Compared to 2010 data, the number of women sources as a proportion of all sources, had decreased by 3 per cent.

- Women continued to remain largely confined to the sphere of the private, emotional and subjective, while men still dominate the sphere of the public, rational and objective.
- Women were significantly under-represented in hard news stories and in all the authoritative, professional and elite source occupational categories and are, instead, significantly over-represented as voices of the general, public (homemaker, parent, student, child) and in the occupational groups most associated with 'women's work', such as health and social and childcare worker, office or service industry worker.

Looking at the function women performed in stories, their contribution as experts (20%) and spokespeople (25%) were low, instead, they were mostly called upon to voice popular opinion (54%) or speak from their personal experience including as eye-witnesses or speak from their own subject position.

The persistence of the Beauty Myth?

Tebbel (2000) argues that women are under more pressure than ever before to conform to the Beauty Myth. She argues that the body and faces of real women have been symbolically annihilated, replaced by computer manipulated, airbrushed, artificially images.

Killborn argues that media representations present women as 'mannequins' – size zero, tall and thin, and with perfect blemish-free skin.

Orbach further argues that the media continues to associate slimness with health, happiness, success and popularity

The representations of women in advertising

Some recent evidence seems to challenge the persistence of the Beauty Myth....

There seems to have been progress in this area in recent years. In 2015, Protein World launched its 'Beach Body Ready' advertising campaign, and while this clearly reinforced the Beauty Myth stereotype, it prompted a significant backlash with several of the advertisements being vandalised, and many women posting images of their ordinary bodies on social media as a criticism of the overt body shaming involved with Protein World's advert.

Since 2015, there has been an increase in the diversity of representations of women in advertising, for example:

- Dove's Real Beauty' campaign⁷² featured a diverse range of body shapes and ethnicities.
- Sport England has been running its successful 'This Girl Can' campaign since 2015.

In 2017, The Advertising Standards Authority launched new guidelines on avoiding gender stereotyping in advertising and in 2019 banned two ads from airing in the UK because they reinforced gender stereotypes.

Finally, UN women has recently launched its 'Unstereotype Alliance', which challenges gender stereotypes in advertising on a global scale. Supporters of this initiative include advertising industry companies such as Unilever, P&G, WPP, Diageo, Google and Facebook.

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16, part 2: Media representations of men

Children now conducted research in the late 1990s and found that there were six common types of representation of men in the media

- The joker – uses laughter to avoid displaying seriousness or emotion
- The jock – demonstrates his power and strength to win the approval of other men and women
- The strong silent type (James Bond) – being in charge, acting decisively, controlling emotion and succeeding with women.
- The big shot – power comes from professional status
- The action hero – strong and shows extreme aggression and violence
- The Buffoon – a bungling father figure, well intentioned and light hearted. (Homer). Hopeless at domestic affairs.

(Boys to Men: Media Messages About Masculinity, Children Now 1999).

The Crisis of Masculinity, the New Man and changing representations of masculinity

As with women, the changing roles of men in society are reflected in changing representations of men in the media. Representations of men are moving away from absolute toughness, stubborn self-reliance and emotional silence with more male characters being comfortable with showing emotions and seeking advice about how to deal with the problems of masculinity.

New Male Identities

- The Emo Boy – who is more caring, sharing, emotional and generally more in touch with his feminine side
- The metrosexual male – who takes pride in appearance and has high levels of consumption.

The male beauty myth and the female gaze?

There are also an increasing amount of images within advertising which encourage men to be concerned with body image and appearance as well as a sexualisation of male bodies, in which they are presented as sex objects for female viewing pleasure, much in the same way as female bodies have been traditionally been used by the media.

17. Media representations of sexuality

Media representations of sexuality have historically been mostly heterosexual, with LGBT representations being largely invisible.

Batchelor et al found that when gay representations did appear in the mainstream media, they weren't generally 'integrated' into plot lines, but rather gayness was part of the plot, seen as a source of anxiety, or as a target of teasing or bullying.

Dyer (2002) observed that 'the person's person' alone does not show that a person is gay, and that the media have constructed stereotypical signs of 'gayness' which include certain facial expressions, vocal tones, stances or clothing.

Craig (1992) identified three media signifiers of gayness

1. **Camp** – the 'flamboyant figure of fun' – a 'non threatening' representation of gayness, lying somewhere between male and female and one of the most widely found representations
2. **Macho** – An openly sexual look which exaggerates aspects of traditional masculinity, as exemplified by the village people.
3. **Deviant** – where gay people are portrayed as evil or devious, possibly as sexual predators or who feel guilty about their sexuality. Such representations seem to construct homosexuality as morally wrong.

Research conducted by Stonewall (2011) concluded that the LGBT community were being subjected to symbolic annihilation. They found that LGBTs were disproportionately consigned to the status of comedic relief – their characters presented as something to laugh at or deride. This was especially found to be the case with representations of lesbianism, frequently presented as over-sexualised and exotic, for male's viewing pleasure.

Out of a total of 126 hours of television programmes analysed:

- 5 hours and 43 minutes focused on LGBT related issues or characters
- 46 minutes portrayed them realistically or positively.

Stoenewall noted that the majority of the coverage represented gays in particular as:

- Unhappy and distressed about their sexual orientation
- As people who had been bullied and rejected by their families

Changing representations of LGBTs in the Media

There are several examples of contemporary shows which have LGBT characters, and in which sexuality is largely incidental to the plots in the show, and only part of the character's identity, rather than them being subsumed by it, as was so often the case in early representations.

Probably the most obvious example of this on British Television is Doctor Who – which has featured several gay characters in recent series.

In the USA (not UK unfortunately) GLAAD conducts an annual content analysis of the representation of LGBT characters. Their 2019 report summarizes content analysis of 111 primetime shows with 857 series regular characters broadcast on the main USA networks (ABC, CBS, The CW, FOX, and NBC).

They found that 8.8 percent of 'series regular characters' were LGBT, an increase of 2.4 percentage points from the previous year's 6.4 percent. This is the highest percentage GLAAD has found since it first gathered data in the 2005-06 season.

Of the 8.8% of LGBT characters:

- 42% were gay men (a total of 47 characters)
- 25% were lesbian
- 29% were Bi+ characters make up 29 percent
- 4% were transgender characters
- The report also noted that last year, out bisexual actor Alan Cumming was the first gay lead in a U.S. scripted broadcast drama on CBS' new series 'Instinct'.

However, closer analysis may reveal that although representation of LGBT characters is more common than ever, these representations may not be that positive compared to straight characters. Stefania Sarrubba argues that all of the LGBT characters in Game of Thrones are killed off before the end of the series, except for Yara Greyjoy, who does something powerful at the end of season eight (takes back the Iron Islands), but we don't actually see this: the show ends focusing on all the straight characters.

The LGBT community and new media

The representations of LGBTs on new media are generally more positive than in mainstream media, possibly because the content is user generated.

Social media sites have been used to generate support for same sex marriages and companies such as Facebook and Twitter seem to be broadly supportive of the LGBT community.

Facebook highlighted its support for the LGBT community with its Celebrate Pride Rainbow Filter in 2015 and there were 3.6 million tweets in 2015 that used the #lovewins relating to the Supreme Court's decision to legalise same sex marriage.

However, research by the University of Alberta tracked all public tweets in the period 2012-15 that used four negative terms about the LGBT community and recorded 56.5 million homophobic comments.

In 2018 Stonewall recently launched its BAME LGBT Voices documentary series to give more a voice/ presence to the diverse range of ethnicities and sexualities which are often under-represented in mainstream media, one such example:

18. Media representations of ethnicity

Van Dijk (1991) conducted content analysis of tens of thousands of news items across the world over several decades and found that representations of black people could be categorised into three stereotypically negative types of news:

- Ethnic minorities as criminals
- Ethnic minorities as a threat
- Ethnic minorities as unimportant.

Minority groups as criminals

Wayne et al (2007) found that nearly 50% of news stories concerning young black people death with them committing crime.

Cushion et al analysed Sunday newspapers, nightly television news and radio news over a 16 week period in 2008-9 and found that black young men and boys were regularly associated with negative news values – nearly 70% of stories were related to crime, especially violent gang crime.

They further pointed out that black crime is often represented as senseless or as motivated by gang rivalries, which little discussion of the broader social and economic context.

Back (2002) conducted discourse analysis of inner-city race disturbances and argued that the media tends to label them as riots, which implies they are irrational and conjures up images of rampaging mobs, which in turn justifies a harsh clampdown by the police.

There is little consideration given to the view that such disturbances may be the result of legitimate concerns, such as responses to police and societal racism, which need to be taken seriously.

Minority groups as a threat

In recent years media moral panics have been constructed around:

- Immigrants, who are a threat in terms of their numbers and impact on jobs and welfare services.
- Refugees and Asylum seekers – analysis from the ICAR in 2005 noted that asylum seekers were often portrayed as being a threat to British social cohesion and national identity, with such people often blamed for social unrest.
- Muslims – who are often portrayed as the ‘enemy within’

Moor et al found that between 2000 and 2008 over a third of stories focused on terrorism, and a third focused on the differences between Muslim communities and British society, while stories of Muslims as victims of crime were rare.

They concluded there were four negative media messages about Muslims:

- Islam as dangerous and irrational
- Multiculturalism as allowing Muslims to spread their message
- Clash of civilisations, with Islam being presented as intolerant, oppressive and misogynistic.
- Islam as a threat to the British way of life, with Sharia law.

Amelie et al (2007) focused on coverage of veiling as an Islamic practice, and found that media coverage tended to present this as a patriarchal oppressive practice, with little coverage focussing on the wearing of the veil as a choice.

Minority Groups as Unimportant

Van Dijk (1999) further noted that some sections of the media imply that white lives are more important than non-white lives.

He claimed, for example, that black victims of crime are not paid as much attention to as white victims of crime.

Shah (2008) claims that the BBC engage in 'tokenism' – Black and Asian actors are cast as presenters or in roles just to give the appearance of ethnic equality, regardless of whether they 'fit' into the role.

The result is that many ethnic minorities do not identify with ethnic minority characters,

As a whole the mainstream media pays little attention to the genuine concerns and interests of ethnic minorities, because the mainstream media is dominated by a metropolitan, liberal, white, male, public school and Oxbridge educated, middle class elite,

19. Media representations of age

This section on some of the ways in which the mainstream media represent young people and the elderly.

Media representations of children

Children are often represented as vulnerable and as needing adult protection, which ties in with the way in which childhood is socially constructed in contemporary society.

The advertising industry represents children as consumers, possibly deliberately to socialise them into becoming consumers in later life, and to increase peer-pressure demand for their products.

[Youth and Children's Work](#) has suggested that there are five major types of youth stereotype:

- Irritating/ annoying
- Binge drinking/ drug addicted
- The drain on society
- The entrepreneurial go-getter
- The exceptional super achiever.

Young people are largely represented in terms of lifestyle and identity, with much of the music and fashion industries aiming their products at young people.

Young people (teenagers especially) are also disproportionately likely to be represented as a problem – with a considerable amount of news coverage being devoted to youth gangs, crime and antisocial behaviour, rather than the challenges facing teenagers or the positive things young people do.

However, some documentaries do portray the complex issues young people face today, such as the recent spate of school documentaries such as 'Educating Essex' etc.

Media representations of old age

Age Concern (2000) identified three key media stereotypes of the elderly. Old people were disproportionately represented as:

- A burden
- Mentally challenged
- Grumpy

Lee et al (2007) conducted a study of adverts and found that old people were underrepresented, appearing in only 15% of ads, but of those 15%, more than 90% of representations were positive – portraying elderly people as ‘golden agers’ enjoying healthy, active lifestyles.

There are also significant gender differences in the way old people are represented in the media: older men are much more visible in the media than older women, and older men are much more likely to be associated with high status and work while older women are generally associated with the family and poverty.

20. Media representations of disability

Barnes (1992) identified a number of recurring stereotypes of disabled people including:

- Pitiably and pathetic – a staple of television documentaries, which often focus on disabled children and the possibilities of miracle cures
- Sinister and evil – for example Villains in James Bond movies often have physical impairments
- Atmospheric or Curio – where disabled people are included in drama to enhance atmosphere of menace, unease, mystery or deprivation.
- Super-cripples – the disabled are sometimes portrayed as having special powers, for example blind people might be viewed as visionaries with sixth sense.
- Sexually abnormal – the media usually treat the disabled as having no sense of sexuality, but when they do there are represented as sexually degenerate.
- Incapable of participating fully in community life – disabled people are rarely shown as integral and productive members of working society – Barnes calls this the stereotype of omission.

Roper (2003) suggests that telethons such as Children in Need rely heavily on cute children who are not representative of the wider disabled community. Telethons put the audience in the position of givers and reinforce the idea that the disabled receivers should be dependent on their able bodied donors. Because telethons are primarily about raising money rather than raising awareness of the reality of being disabled, they may end up reinforcing stereotypes of disabled people.

Newspaper representations of the disabled

Williams-Findlay (2009) examined the content of The Times and The Guardian to see whether the coverage of the disabled had changed between 1989 and 2009.

Williams-Findlay found that the use of stereotypical words had declined in those 20 years, but that stereotypical representations were still present in 2009 because journalists still assumed that disability was 'tragic'.

Watson et al (2011) compared tabloid media coverage of disability in five newspapers in 2004-5 with coverage in 2010-11 they found that:

- There had been a significant increase in the reporting of disability
- The proportion of articles reporting disability in sympathetic and deserving terms had fallen.
- In 2010-11 the reporting of groups with mental disabilities was particularly negative, often associated with them being welfare scroungers.
- Articles focussing on disability benefit fraud increased threefold between 2005 and 2011.

21. The hypodermic syringe model of audience effects

The hypodermic syringe model believes that the media can have a direct and immediate effect on the audience. This model sees the audience as a 'homogeneous mass' (all the same), as passive and believing what they see in the media without questioning the content.

It is thus possible for content creators to use their media productions to manipulate vulnerable audiences into thinking or acting in certain ways.

The culture industry

This theory of media effects is associated with neo-Marxists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in the 1940s, who had managed to escape Nazi Germany and resettled in America.

They noted that there were similarities between the 'propaganda industry' in Nazi Germany' and what they called the 'Culture Industry' in the United States.

Adorno and Max Horkheimer theorised that popular culture in the USA was like a factory producing standardized content which was used to manipulate a passive mass audience.

They argued that consumption of the 'dumbed down' content of popular culture made people passive and false psychological needs that could only be met and satisfied by the products of capitalism.

The ultimate function of the culture industry was thus to manipulate audiences into becoming good consumers and keeping capitalism going.

Further evidence that the media can have direct effects on a passive audience

One of the earliest examples is the audience response to Orson Welles' radio adaptation of 'War of the Worlds' in 1938.

War of the Worlds is a fictional story about Alien invaders coming from Mars and killing very large numbers of people in the process. The original radio adaptation was done in the style of a news report, and some of the listeners who tuned in after the show had begun (and so missed the introduction to it) actually believed they were hearing a news report, packed their cars and fled to the country.

Feminist sociologists such as Susi Orbach and Naomi Wolfe have highlighted how the 'beauty myth', especially the representations of size zero as normal, have encouraged an increase in eating disorders, especially among young women, as well as an increase in mental health problems.

More recent evidence suggests that the campaigns behind both Trump and Brexit used sophisticated targeted advertising to nudge voters into voting for Trump and Brexit, suggesting the media can have a very direct and immediate effect on specific populations (even if such campaigns didn't treat the audience as a 'mass' and so this is only partial support the Hypodermic Syringe Model).

Imitation or Copycat Violence

One of the most researched areas of media effects is that surrounding the relationship between media violence and real-life violence. There is some evidence that media violence can 'cause' people to be more violence in real-life...

The Bandura 'Bobo Doll' experiment is evidence that media-violence can 'cause' children to act more aggressively when given the opportunity to do so. Bandura showed three groups of children real, film and cartoon examples of a bobo-doll being beaten with a mallet. A further group of children were shown no violence. The children were then taken to a room with lots of toys, but then 'frustrated' by being told the toys were not for them. They were then taken to a room with a mallet and a bobo-doll, and the children who had seen the violent examples (whether real, film, or cartoon) imitated the violence by beating the doll themselves, while the children who had seen no violence did not beat the doll.

Desensitization

Newson (1994) theorised that the effects of media violence on children were more subtle and gradual. She argued that continued exposure to violence in films over several years 'desensitised' children and teenagers to violence and that they came to see violence as a norm, and as a possible way of solving problems. She also argued that television and film violence tended to encourage people to identify with the violent perpetrators, rather than the victims.

Newson's research led to increased censorship in the film industry – for example, the British Board of Film was given the power to apply age certificates and T.V. companies agreed on a 9.00 watershed, before which shows would not feature significant sexual or violent scenes.

Criticisms of the hypodermic syringe model

Firstly, this model may have been true in the 1940s when the media was relatively new and audiences less literate, but in today's new media age, audiences are more likely to criticise what they see rather than just believing it.

Secondly, the hypodermic syringe model treats audiences a 'homogenous mass, but today's audiences are more diverse than in the past, so this model is less applicable. This post offers a more nuanced counterpoint: it theorises that the masses were 'willingly misled' and thus co-produced a false reality in Nazi Germany in the 1930s and 40s.

Thirdly, it's too simplistic a theory to explain social problems – societal violence has many causes, and it's all too easy to scapegoat the media.

Fourthly, where Bandura's imitative aggression model is concerned, this was carried out in such an artificial environment, it tells us little about how violence happens in real life.

22. The two-step flow model

The two-step flow model of audience effects was derived by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1965) which views the audience as active and influenced by influential opinion leaders, rather than directly by media content.

Katz and Lazarsfeld argued that social networks were dominated by opinion leaders, who were influential people within social networks with the power to influence how others around them saw the world.

Opinion Leaders are exposed to media content, and they then share their interpretation of that content with the wider audience. Thus media content goes through two stages, with the wider audience being primarily influenced by the views of the active opinion leaders rather than being influenced directly by media content.

Evaluations

- + The two-step flow model recognises that most people watch media as part of a social network.
- + This model might be especially useful for understanding the role of parents as opinion leaders.
- - There is a sense in which the media has a 'direct effect' - on the opinion leaders, so there may still be some validity in the hypodermic syringe model.
- - This model may not apply to people who are socially isolated - and these could be the people who are most likely to be influenced by media content.

23. The reception analysis model of audience effects

Reception analysis is an 'active audience' model associated with Morley (1980) who conducted research on how several different groups of people interpreted media messages.

Morley found that there are three main types of 'readings' which audiences make of media content:

- The dominant reading, which is the same as the media content creators.
- The oppositional view – which opposes the views expressed in the media
- Negotiated – where people interpret media content to fit in with their own lives.

Morley argued that audiences were polysemic –

According to Morley audiences came from many different cultures and thus there were many possible 'negotiated' readings. He further argued that individuals had many aspects to their identities, and they interpreted media content in a variety of ways, often chopping and changing their interpretations over time.

He thus believed that audiences were active rather than passive and their interpretations were not always easy to predict.

Selective Filter

The selective filter model of audience effects (Klapper 1960) holds that media messages pass through three filters before they have an effect.

This is an active audience model which suggests that the audience do not just passively accept what they see in the media as 'the truth', as the hypodermic syringe model suggests.

According to this theory the three filters are:

1. selective exposure
2. selective perception
3. selective retention

Selective exposure

Different groups are exposed to different media content, which will influence the effect the media can have on them.

Audiences actively choose what to watch, which is influenced by their interests, age, gender, education etc.

Censorship may also deny some groups access to certain content, thus denying them exposure. An example of this is with age-graded media content which parents might prevent their children from watching.

Selective perception

Audiences may reject some of the content they are exposed to, for example because what they see does not fit in with their view of the world.

Festinger (1957) argued that people actively seek out media content which affirms their already existing views of the world.

Selective retention

Finally, content has to stick for it to have an effect.

Audiences are more likely to remember content they agree with.

24. Uses and Gratifications

The uses and gratification model states that audiences are active users of media content and that they use the media to fulfil four main types of need.

Diversion

People use media to escape from their daily routines.

In some cases, media usage may make up for lack of satisfaction in work or personal life.

Personal relationships

The media may compensate for the decline of community and meaningful, intimate relationships

For example soap characters may be seen as companions in the absence of family or friends.

Personal identity

People may use characters to they identify with to help them make decisions in life.

People use Facebook to express identities in ways they can control.

Surveillance

People use the media to obtain information about the world, primarily the news.

Criticisms of the uses and gratifications model of audience effects

- There is a lack of substantive research which supports this theory
- Marxists argue it exaggerates audiences' capacity to interpret media content, ignoring the power of agenda setting.
- Postmodernists argue there are an even wider set of uses individuals make of media.

25. The reception analysis model of audience effects

The cultural effects model is a Marxist model audience effects, usually associated with neo-Marxism and the Glasgow University Media Group.

The media and the dominant ideology

According to the cultural effects model, the media contains ideological messages that reflect the values of media owners and professionals who expect audiences to agree with their preferred readings of events.

Points of view which are oppositional media owners and middle-class journalists' world views are generally kept out of the mainstream media through processes such as agenda setting and gatekeeping.

Ideological control through gradual exposure

Audiences are continually exposed to the dominant ideology and this has a gradual 'drip-drip' effect and over time audiences come to share the views of the rich and powerful. They also come to criticise those who have been demonised by the ideological framing of the elite: such as immigrants and those on benefits.

The cultural effects model recognises that audiences are active and that they interpret media content in diverse ways, but they do argue that interpretations are narrow due to long term ideological framing of media content.

Criticisms of the cultural effects model

- Methodologically it is difficult to test any theory on long term media effects. It is almost impossible to isolate the independent effect that long-term exposure to media content has over several years.
- It seems increasingly unlikely that homogenous content has homogenous effects in the postmodern age of new media.

26. The Postmodernist model of audience effects

[Postmodernists](#) argue that the media is an integral part of postmodern society. Individuals actively use the media to construct their identities, and there is a sense of playfulness, creativity and unpredictability about how they go about doing this.

Postmodernists criticise other theories of audience effects, especially the Hypodermic Syringe model for assuming that audiences are homogenous (the same) and any models which assume there is such a thing as one dominant or preferred reading of media messages, such as the reception analysis model.

A diverse and active audience

Individuals read media in a diverse variety of ways, and how they read media content depends on a range of factors, including the entirety of an individual's prior life experiences. Audiences can also change the way they interpret media content over time and make multiple readings of the same content simultaneously.

It follows that of all the models of audience effects, the postmodernist model sees the audience as the most active.

No such thing as an 'underlying' reality

Finally, postmodernists also argue that the media is constitutive of people's realities – there is no deeper reality underneath media representations, media representations are no less real than non-media reality (if indeed there is such a thing!). It is thus meaningless to say that the media has an 'effect' on audiences as to make such a claim assumes that media representations and the audience are two different things, in postmodernism they are not, they are one and the same.

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