

The Media

pp. 764-819

Giddens, Anthony; Sutton, Philip W., (2013) Sociology, Seventh edition., Cambridge: Polity

Atgoffir staff a myfyrwyr Prifysgol Cymru Y Drindod Dewi Sant bod hawlfraint ar y darn hwn ac ar y gwaith y cafodd ei gymryd ohono. Gwnaed y Copi Digidol hwn o dan delerau trwydded CLA sy'n caniatáu i chi:

- fynd at gopi a'i lwytho i lawr;
- argraffu copi;

Sylwch bod y deunydd hwn yn UNIG at ddefnydd myfyrwyr sydd wedi cofrestru ar y cwrs astudio fel y nodir yn yr adran isod. Caniateir i holl staff a myfyrwyr eraill ddarllen y deunydd yn unig ac ni ddylent ei lwytho i lawr ac/neu argraffu copi

Mae'r Copi Digidol hwn ac unrhyw gopi digidol neu brintiedig a ddarparwyd i chi, neu a wnaed gennych, o dan delerau'r Drwydded hon, i'w ddefnyddio gyda'r Cwrs Astudio hwn. Gellwch gadw copïau o'r fath ar ôl i'r cwrs ddod i ben, ond at eich defnydd personol eich hun yn unig. Bydd pob copi (yn cynnwys copïau electronig) yn cynnwys y Rhybudd Hawlfraint hwn a bydd yn rhaid eu dinistrio ac/neu eu dileu pan fydd Prifysgol Cymru Y Drindod Dewi Sant yn galw am hynny.

Ac eithrio'r hyn a ganiateir gan gyfraith hawlfraint, ni chaniateir copïo, cadw neu ddosbarthu pellach (yn cynnwys drwy e-bost) heb ganiatâd deiliad yr hawlfraint.

Mae gan yr awdur (ac mae'r term hwnnw'n cynnwys arlunwyr a chrewyr gweledol eraill) hawliau moesol dros y gwaith ac ni all staff na myfyrwyr achosi, na chaniatáu, i'r gwaith gael ei aflunio, ei lurgunio neu ei addasu mewn unrhyw ffordd arall, neu ei drin yn ddiraddiol mewn unrhyw ffordd, a fyddai'n niweidiol i anrhydedd neu enw da'r awdur.

Mae hon yn fersiwn ddigidol o ddeunydd hawlfraint a wnaed dan drwydded gan ddeiliad yr hawl, ac ni ellir sicrhau ei chywirdeb. Cyfeiriwch at yr argraffiad cyhoeddedig gwreiddiol os gwelwch yn dda.

Trwyddedwyd i'w ddefnyddio ar gyfer y cwrs HPAN5016/6016 - Mind Games: Media and Psychology

Teitl: Sociology

Enw'r Awdur: Giddens, Anthony; Sutton, Philip W.

Enw'r Cyhoeddwr: Polity

Staff and students of the University of Wales, Trinity Saint David are reminded that copyright subsists in this extract and the work from which it was taken. This Digital Copy has been made under the terms of a CLA licence which allows you to:

- access and download a copy;
- print out a copy;

Please note that this material is for use ONLY by students registered on the course of study as stated in the section below. All other staff and students are only entitled to browse the material and should not download and/or print out a copy.

This Digital Copy and any digital or printed copy supplied to or made by you under the terms of this Licence are for use in connection with this Course of Study. You may retain such copies after the end of the course, but strictly for your own personal use.

All copies (including electronic copies) shall include this Copyright Notice and shall be destroyed and/or deleted if and when required by University of Wales, Trinity Saint David.

Except as provided for by copyright law, no further copying, storage or distribution (including by e-mail) is permitted without the consent of the copyright holder

The author (which term includes artists and other visual creators) has moral rights in the work and neither staff nor students may cause, or permit, the distortion, mutilation or other modification of the work, or any other derogatory treatment of it, which would be prejudicial to the honour or reputation of the author. This is a digital version of copyright material made under licence from the rightsholder, and its accuracy cannot be guaranteed. Please refer to the original published edition.

Course of Study: HPAN5016/6016 - Mind Games: Media and Psychology

Title: Sociology

Name of Author: Giddens, Anthony; Sutton, Philip W.

Name of Publisher: Polity

Chapter

18



The Media

.....

Contents

Media in a global age	768
The digital revolution	768
The Internet and World Wide Web	770
Film	775
Television	777
Music	781
Newspapers	786
Theorizing the media	788
Functionalism	788
Conflict theories	789
Symbolic interactionism	795
Postmodern theory	798
Audiences and media representations	800
Audience studies	800
Representing class, gender, ethnicity and disability	802
Controlling the global media	805
Media imperialism?	806
Ownership of media 'supercompanies'	808
Resistance and alternatives to the global media	813
Conclusion	815
<i>Chapter review</i>	<i>816</i>
<i>Research in practice</i>	<i>817</i>
<i>Thinking it through</i>	<i>817</i>
<i>Society in the arts</i>	<i>818</i>
<i>Further reading</i>	<i>818</i>
<i>Internet links</i>	<i>819</i>



Since the late nineteenth century, the character of modern communication technology has been radically transformed. Here, New Yorkers in Times Square watch the terrorist attacks against the World Trade Center in real time.

.....

On 11 September 2001, terrorists hijacked three planes and used them to attack sites in Washington and New York. When the second plane crashed into the Twin Towers in New York, some twenty minutes after the first tower had been struck, it is estimated that a global audience of 2 billion people were watching the attack and its destructive aftermath in real time, 'live' on television news. You may have been one of them. Yet such an obvious fact hides the radical transformation in communications since the late nineteenth century.

In 1865, when the actor John Wilkes Booth assassinated US President Abraham Lincoln in a Washington theatre, it took twelve days before a ship carrying the news reached London. A small boat off the south coast of Ireland met the ship carrying the message from the United States and the news was telegraphed to London from Cork, beating the ship by three days. It was not until the 1950s that a dedicated trans-oceanic cable existed to carry telegraphs instantly across the Atlantic, though long-wave radio transmission between continents became possible in the early twentieth century.

In the twenty-first century, communication technologies enable information to be shared instantaneously and simultaneously with many millions of people almost anywhere in the world. **Communication** – the transfer of information from one individual or group to another, whether in speech or through the mass media of modern times – is crucial to any society. In this chapter, we will explore the transformations affecting the **mass media** of communications as part of globalization. There are a wide variety of forms of mass media, such as television, newspapers, films, radio and the Internet. These are referred to as ‘mass’ media because they communicate to a mass audience comprised of very large numbers of people.

The Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan (1964) famously argued that media forms have very different effects on society. His dictum is that ‘the medium is the message’. That is, society is influenced much more by the *type* of the media than by the content or the messages it conveys. Everyday life is experienced differently in a society in which the Internet, relaying communications instantaneously from one side of the globe to the other, plays an important role, to one that relies on horses, ships or the telegraph cable. According to McLuhan, modern electronic media tend to create a **global village** in which people throughout the world see major events unfold together. In this sense, the human world is becoming ever more integrated into a single ‘community of fate’.



How many of your friends around the world would not know who these people are?

We live today in an interconnected world in which people experience the same events from many different places. The process of globalization and the power of communication technology allow people from Caracas to Cairo to receive the same popular music, news, films and television programmes. Twenty-four-hour news channels report on stories in real time, broadcasting unfolding events for the world to watch. Films made in Hollywood or Hong Kong reach audiences around the world, while sporting celebrities such as David Beckham and Maria Sharapova are household names on every continent.

Even thirty years ago, areas of communication – print, television and film – were still relatively self-contained spheres, but today they have become intertwined to a remarkable degree. This is often described as **media convergence**, the process through which

apparently distinct media forms merge in new ways. Television, radio, newspapers and telephones have undergone profound transformations as a result of advances in technology and the rapid spread of the Internet. For example, newspapers can now be read online, radio stations are accessed on digital televisions and mobile phones enable Internet access. With the expansion of technologies such as voice recognition, broadband, web casting and cable links, the Internet may already have become the primary conduit in the developed countries for the delivery of information, entertainment, advertising and commerce.

We start with the relatively recent digital revolution in communications, focusing on the Internet and World Wide Web. We then provide a brief account of some selected forms of mass media – film, television, music and newspapers – before considering some of the main theoretical approaches to studying the media and their role in society. Media representations of different social groups and the effects of mass media on the audience follow, before the chapter ends with a discussion of the concentrated ownership of the global media and resistance to it.

Media in a global age

For most of human history the main means of communication was speech, with face-to-face communication being the norm. In such oral cultures, information, ideas and knowledge were transmitted across generations by word of mouth, and the kind of repositories of useful knowledge we are used to – such as books and libraries – just did not exist. Once speech could be written down and stored, initially on stone, the first writing cultures began to emerge, initially in China around 3,000 years ago. Religions have played a major part in the development of flexible communications by finding ways of producing manuscripts and texts for study and transportation, such as on papyrus and parchment, literally to ‘spread the word’.

An important precursor to the modern mass media was the invention in the mid-

fifteenth century of the Gutenberg movable type printing press, which enabled texts to be reproduced. Gutenberg made use of existing technologies – paper and woodblock printing – that originated in Asia much earlier. Yet, although technological advances and new uses of older technologies played a crucial part in the development of the mass media, the influence of social, cultural and economic factors must also be taken into account. For instance, mass forms of printed media could only develop in societies with relatively cheap access to them and an educated population able to take advantage of them.

In the late twentieth century, digital technology led to **new media** such as the mobile and smart phone, video games, digital television and the Internet. We will look first at this ‘digital revolution’ in communications, especially the Internet and World Wide Web. We then examine the ways in which globalization impacts on other mass media, taking film, television, music and newspapers as our cases, noting how the digital revolution is transforming these older forms.



For more on the Internet and mobile phones, see chapter 4, ‘Globalization and Social Change’.

The digital revolution

In *Being Digital* (1995), Nicholas Negroponte analysed the revolutionary potential of digital data in the new media. Any piece of information, including pictures, moving images and sounds, can be translated through a binary system into ‘bits’. A bit can be a 1 or a 0. For instance, the digital representation of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, is 1, 10, 11, 100, 101. Digitization is at the origin of the development of multimedia: what used to be different media needing different technologies (such as visuals and sound) can now be combined on a single medium (such as DVDs and PCs). In recent years the processing power of computers has doubled every eighteen months and Internet speeds have become faster, making it possible to watch films and

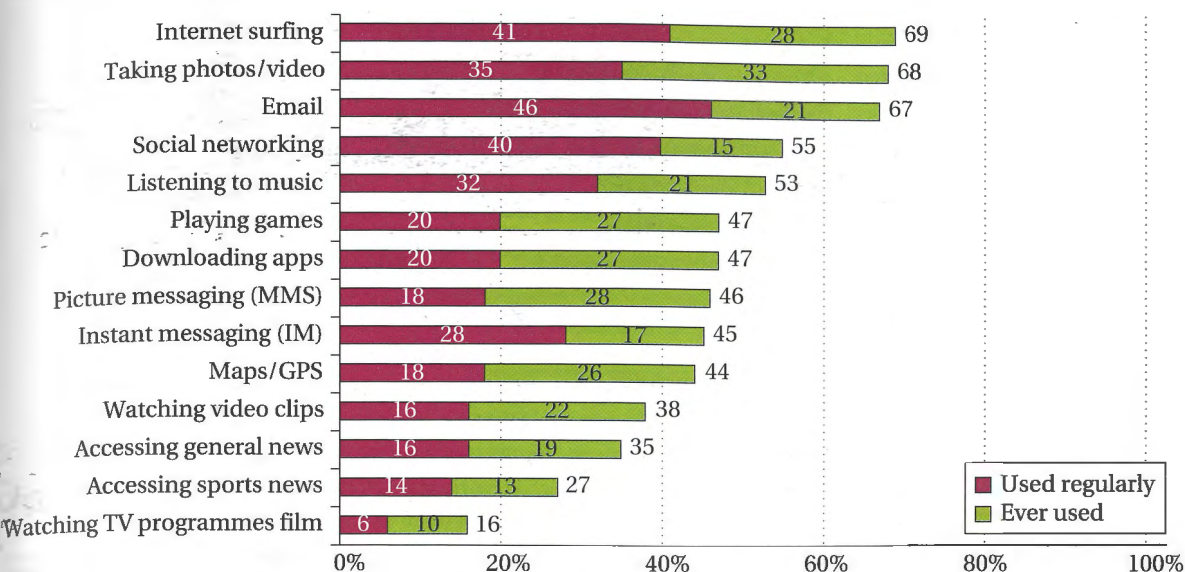


Figure 18.1 Activities conducted on a smartphone: adults

Source: Ofcom (2011: 56).

listen to music via the Internet. Digitization also permits the development of interactive media, in which people actively participate in, or structure, what they see or hear.

One of the most fundamental aspects of media concerns the infrastructure through which information is communicated and exchanged. Some important technological advances over the second half of the twentieth century completely transformed the face of **telecommunications** – the communication of information, sounds or images at a distance through a technological medium. New communication technologies stand behind profound changes in the world's money systems and stock markets. Money is no longer just physical cheques or cash in your pocket. More and more, money has become electronic, 'stored' in computers in the world's banks. The value of whatever cash you do have is determined by the activities of traders on electronically linked money markets, and these markets are the product of the last few decades, a marriage between computers and satellite communications.

Four technological trends have led to these developments: first, the constant improve-

ment in the *capabilities of computers*, together with declining costs; second, *digitization of data*, making possible the integration of computer and telecommunications technologies; third, *satellite communications*; and, fourth, *fibre optics*, which allow many different messages to travel down a single cable. The dramatic communications explosion of recent years shows no sign of slowing down. Indeed, the rapid pace of development means that our discussion of digital technologies, their applications and consequences may well be looking dated by the time you read this book!

For example, since we wrote our 6th edition in 2008, there has been a radical take-up of the new 'smartphones' and tablet PCs, made possible by the spread of wireless technology (Wi-Fi), which enables Internet access from almost anywhere. By the time you read this chapter, it may well be out of date yet again! Smartphones (such as Apple's iPhone or Google's Android) – which integrate the functions of computers into small, hand-held devices – have become particularly widespread and are used for an ever wider range of activities (figures 18.1 and 18.2). In 2007, smartphone sales overtook those of laptop

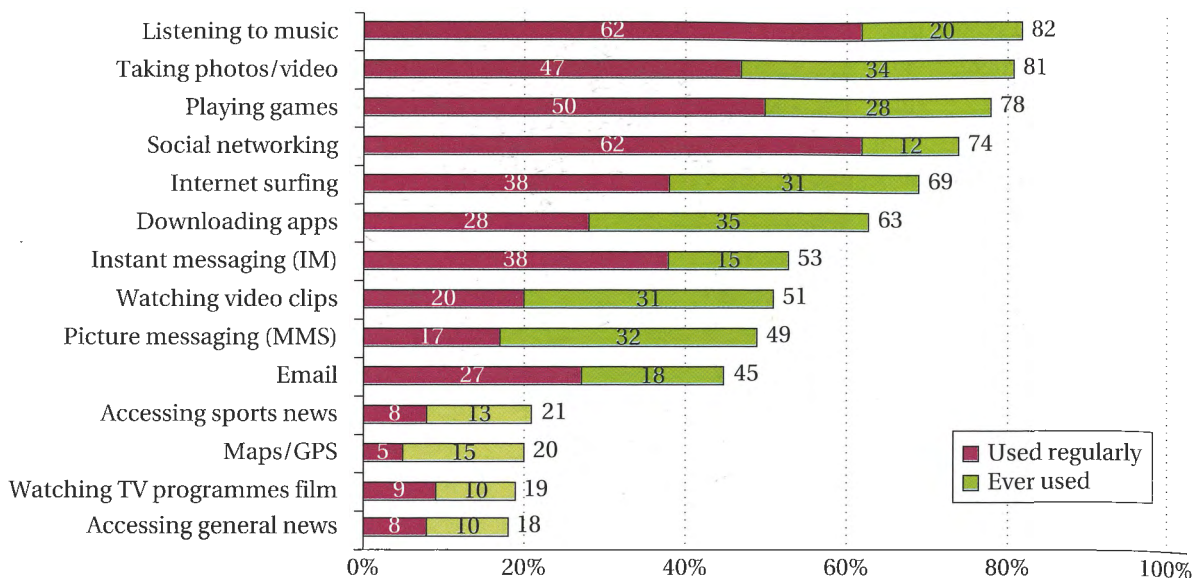


Figure 18.2 Activities conducted on a smartphone: teenagers

Source: Ofcom (2011: 57).

PCs for the first time, and, in 2011, Ofcom, the UK communications regulator, reported that 27 per cent of adults and almost half of all teenagers (47 per cent) now use a smartphone. This survey also found that 37 per cent of adult users and 60 per cent of teenagers were 'highly addicted' to their smartphones, with 81 per cent of all users leaving them switched on for twenty-four hours a day (Ofcom 2011).

Computing has certainly come a long way, from the early stage of large mainframe machines, taking up entire rooms, to the second era of the personal computer, used in fixed sites such as desks in workplaces and homes. The current miniaturization of the computer has, it is argued, taken us into a third era of the computing age, 'the era of ubiquitous computing', in which computers are mobile and part of almost every social environment (Maier 2011: 143–4). As the Ofcom research shows, digital technology is changing people's behaviour and demanding new social norms.

THINKING CRITICALLY

What do people use smartphones for?

Conduct a participant observation of smart/mobile phone use over one week, noting how people use their phones in public places and any criticisms levelled at such use. On the basis of your observations, what are the new and emerging social norms governing acceptable mobile phone use?

The Internet and World Wide Web

In the early 1990s, it became clear that the future lay not with individual personal computers (PCs) but with a global system of interconnected computers – the **Internet**. Although many computer users may not have realized it at the time, the PC was becoming little more than a point of access to events happening on a network stretching across the planet – one that is not owned by any individual or company.

The potential of the Internet for the growth of international political activism is explored in chapter 22, 'Politics, Government and Social Movements'.

The Internet originated during the Cold War period, developed from a system used in the Pentagon, headquarters of the American military, from 1969. This system was named the ARPA net, after the Pentagon's Advanced Research Projects Agency. ARPA sought to enable scientists working on military projects in different parts of America to pool their resources and share expensive equipment. Almost as an afterthought, its originators thought of a way to send messages, and electronic mail – 'email' – was born. Until the early 1980s, the Pentagon Internet consisted of just 500 computers in military laboratories and university computer science departments. Other people in universities caught on and began using the system for their own purposes, and by 1987 the Internet had 28,000 host computers at many universities and research labs.

The spread of commercial Internet service providers (ISPs) offering dial-up and, later, broadband access fuelled the growing number of households with online capability. Online services, electronic bulletin boards, chat-rooms and software libraries were put onto the net by a bewildering variety of people, initially mainly in the United States, but soon all over the world. Corporations also got in on the act, and in 1994 companies overtook universities as the dominant users of the network.

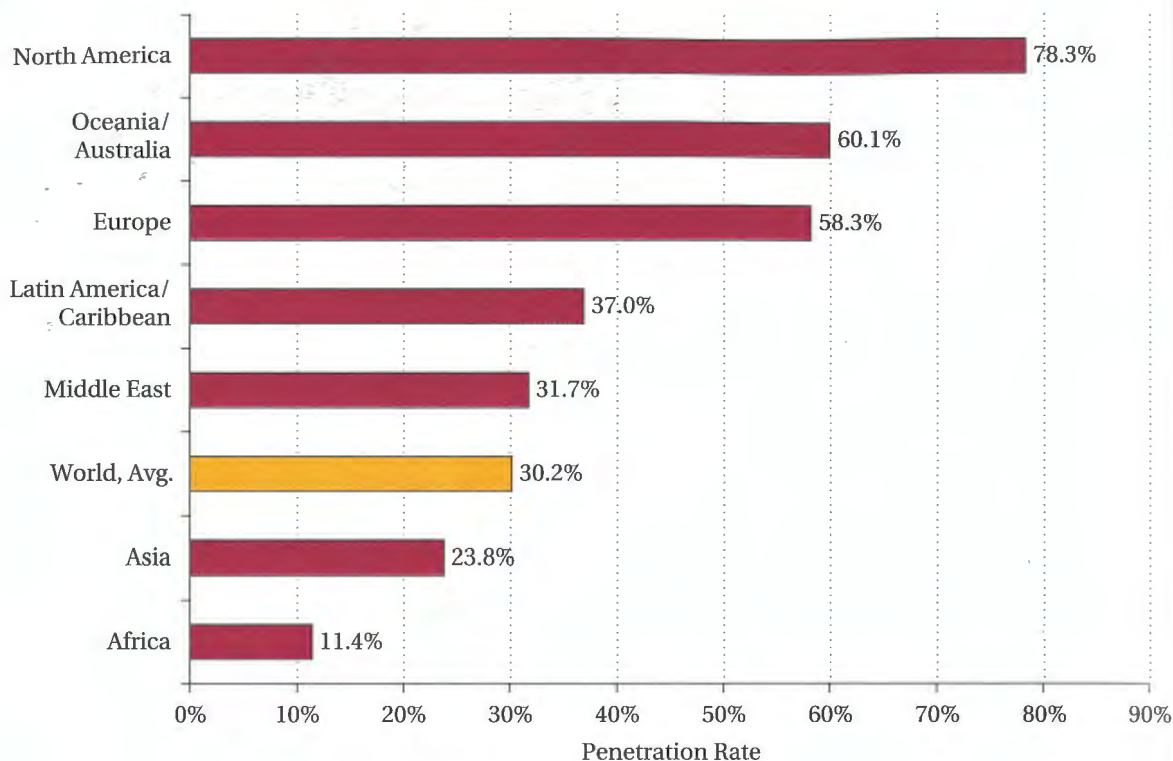
The best-known use of the Internet is, of course, the World Wide Web – in effect, a global multimedia library. It was invented by a British software engineer, Tim Berners-Lee, at a Swiss physics lab in 1990, and the software that popularized it across the world was written by an undergraduate at the University of Illinois. Users generally navigate the web with the help of a 'web browser' – a software program that allows them to search for information and to locate particular sites or web pages. Websites

have grown in sophistication, and many today boast intricate graphics and photographs, video and audio files. The web also serves as the main interface for 'e-commerce' – business transactions conducted online.

With the spread of cheaper, home-based personal computers, access to the Internet continues to grow. The UK's Office for National Statistics estimates that 60 per cent of UK adults accessed the Internet every day in 2010 (ONS 2011a). This was double the 2006 figure. Some 73 per cent of all households (19.2 million) had their own Internet connection. Increasing numbers of people were shopping online in 2010, with 62 per cent of all adults (31 million) having bought goods and services online in the previous twelve months. Social networking had grown enormously, with 43 per cent of Internet users having posted messages on social networks, chat sites or blogs. Networking was most popular among the sixteen- to 24-year-old age group. There was also a trend towards watching television and listening to radio over the Internet, with 17.4 million adults doing so, compared with just 6.4 million in 2006. This evidence suggests that more people are accessing and using the Internet and doing so for a wider variety of activities.

Online social networks and social media are also discussed in chapter 19, 'Organizations and Networks'.

However, ONS data reveal that Internet access and use is marked by inequalities. Nationally, around 8.7 million people (17.5 per cent) had never used the Internet. Of these, 5.1 million were women, 3.6 million were men; two-thirds were aged sixty-five or over and almost half (48.3 per cent) were disabled. Indeed, just over one-third of disabled people had never been online compared with just 11.9 per cent of people with no disability. There were also significant regional differences. Over one-fifth of the populations of Northern Ireland, Merseyside, south-western Scotland and Northumberland and Tyne and Wear had never been online, but in the wealthier



Note: Penetration rates are based on a world population of 6,930,055,154 and 2,095,006,005 estimated internet users on 31 March 2011.

Figure 18.3 World Internet penetration rates by geographic region, 2011

Source: Internet World Stats (2011).

counties of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire, this figure was only 10.2 per cent (ONS 2011b).

How many people are connected to the Internet globally is not known with any certainty, but in 2011 the best estimate was just over 2 billion (Internet World Stats 2011). Access remains geographically uneven. Just 11.4 per cent of the population of Africa and 23.8 per cent in Asia are Internet users, compared with 78.3 per cent in North America and 60 per cent in Australia/Oceania (see figure 18.3).

One development which may lead to an even faster spread of the Internet is the advent of **cloud computing**. In essence, cloud computing enables computing to be delivered to end users as a service rather than as products, rather like electricity and other utilities,

eliminating the need for every individual to have the same services, platforms and software installed on their devices. This may not appear to be a particularly significant change, as many companies and universities already have their own internal 'intranets' which operate in a similar way. However, many experts insist that 'cloud computing is revolutionary, even if the technology it is built on is evolutionary' (Sosinsky 2011: 3).

The revolutionary aspect of cloud computing is that it makes potentially unlimited computing resources universally and continuously available. Applications, programs, file storage and operating systems are based in large data-centres whose locations are unknown to end users. These resources are then made available, usually on a pay-as-you-go basis. For users

with an Internet connection, there are some clear advantages to this system. Individuals can access the services they need whenever they need them without incurring the cost of buying and updating expensive software and computing goods. They can also use whatever device they have, such as a laptop or tablet PC, notebook or smartphone, again without having to install any additional products on each. Cloud computing carries the potential to simplify computing for the majority, who do not need any specialized knowledge to make use of the services they buy, and to bring an enormous range of services to increasingly mobile, wireless Internet devices.

Cloud computing is changing the way businesses organize their IT. Rather than supporting in-house departments, companies can effectively outsource IT management to the cloud. Buying computing from a service provider means that constant upgrading, maintenance and patching of programs and software applications become the responsibility of the provider, not the individual company's management. And adopting a cloud computing model can also be much cheaper than having to purchase 'shrink-wrapped' software and its associated licences.

However there are some disadvantages with the cloud model. Cloud services tend to be generic and may not be attractive to large companies which can afford to tailor their computing needs to their specific business. More serious are issues of privacy, confidentiality and data security. As more information travels across wireless connections and more material is stored in datacentres across the world, users are forced to cede control to cloud providers. For some types of sensitive data and some businesses, including much academic research, cloud computing may not be quite as obviously advantageous as initially it appears. Users are also dependent on reliable access to providers' websites, which can be problematic: 'In July 2008, Amazon's S3 cloud storage service went down for the second time that year. A lot of applications were hosted by the company and all those services could not be accessed until techs could fix the problem.

Some applications were down for 8 hours' (Velte et al. 2010: 6).

Nonetheless, although cloud computing is in its infancy, some are already speculating that it is moving inexorably towards the creation of an 'intercloud' – an interconnected, global 'cloud of clouds' (Rothenberg 2010). This may sound fanciful but, in fact, it is not dissimilar to the Internet itself, which is characterized as a 'global network of networks'. If pay-as-you-go, utility computing does take off globally in the next few years, then an intercloud will become more necessary as single clouds become saturated with user demand, necessitating more collaboration and sharing of resources between cloud providers. And, given the speed with which mobile communication devices have become part of everyday life in the last decade, it may not be too long before the intercloud becomes as normal as the Internet.

The impact of the Internet

Many see the Internet as exemplifying an emerging networked global society (Castells 2006). Interactions on the Internet take place in the virtual world of cyberspace. **Cyberspace** means the space of interaction formed by the global network of computers that compose the Internet. In cyberspace, we cannot know with any certainty the details of people's identity, whether they are male or female, or where in the world they are. Indeed, cyberspace often feels rather like an alternative form of reality and a type of medium which gives users more control than in earlier media forms. Kolker (2009: 253) argues that:

In our relationship with traditional media, we are always aware that what we read, hear, and see has some kind of authorship behind it: someone writing and editing the newspaper column; producing, directing, and distributing a recording, a radio or TV show, or a movie. Advertising reminds us continuously that someone wants something from us . . . But at the keyboard and online, we seem to be in control and in intimate connection with something or someone, in a world both internal and external simultaneously.

Opinions on the effects of the Internet fall into two broad categories. On the one hand are those who see the online world as fostering electronic relationships that either enhance or supplement existing face-to-face interactions. For example, while travelling or working abroad, people can use the Internet to communicate regularly with friends and relatives at home, making distance and separation more tolerable. The Internet also allows the formation of new types of relationship, such as the 'anonymous' online users who meet on social networks and chatrooms to discuss topics of mutual interest. Many Internet users become part of lively online communities that are qualitatively different from those they inhabit in the physical world. Scholars who see the Internet as a positive addition to human life argue that it expands and enriches our social networks.

On the other hand, some are less enthusiastic. As people spend more and more time communicating online and handling daily tasks in cyberspace, they may spend less time interacting with one another in the physical world. Some sociologists fear that the spread of Internet technology will lead to increased social isolation. They argue that one effect of increasing Internet access in households is that people are spending less 'quality time' with their families and friends. The Internet is encroaching on domestic life as the lines between work and home are blurred: many employees continue to work at home after hours – checking email or finishing tasks that they were unable to complete during the day. Personal relationships suffer, traditional forms of entertainment such as theatre and books fall by the wayside, and the fabric of social life is weakened.

In *The Virtual Community* (2000), Howard Rheingold acknowledges the positive potential of *computer-mediated communications* while accepting that its darker side cannot simply be wished away. Rheingold (2000: 5) is particularly interested in **virtual communities**, which he defines as 'social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough

people carry on . . . public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace'. He provides an extended description and analysis of a virtual community – a parenting conference – on the WELL (Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link), a computer conferencing system that enables people across the world to engage in open public discussions and to exchange private emails. Rheingold says that being a part of the WELL is very much like being part of the real physical world, but in disembodied form. Members help each other to solve problems, exchange information and, sometimes, disagree and fall out. As he says:

People in virtual communities use words on screens to exchange pleasantries and argue, engage in intellectual discourse, conduct commerce, exchange knowledge, share emotional support, make plans, brainstorm, gossip, feud, fall in love, find friends and lose them, play games, flirt, create a little high art and a lot of idle talk. People in virtual communities do just about everything people do in real life, but we leave our bodies behind. You can't kiss anybody and nobody can punch you in the nose, but a lot can happen within those boundaries. (2000: xvii)

Nevertheless, Rheingold also acknowledges the less palatable potential of the Internet. For example, it is possible that it will be dominated by business corporations who see members of virtual communities simply as commodities, gathering and selling their details for profit to anyone who wants it. In addition, the Internet offers opportunities for intensified surveillance and monitoring of the population. This 'nightmare vision' owes something to Foucault's ideas on the eighteenth-century Panopticon, a prison design based on the principle of continuous monitoring of prisoners by guards. Rheingold has no magic solutions, but suggests that such criticisms have to be kept in mind by all Internet enthusiasts, who will have to work hard to create a human-centred virtual world.

See chapter 19, 'Organizations and Networks', for a discussion of the Panopticon.

Questions of personal identity, new forms of community and possibilities for democratic participation are discussed in chapter 8, 'Social Interaction and Everyday Life'.

Very similar fears were expressed as television burst onto the media scene. In *The Lonely Crowd* (1961), an influential sociological analysis of American society in the 1950s, David Riesman and his colleagues expressed concern about the effects of TV on family and community life. While some of their fears were well founded, television and the mass media have also enriched the social world in many ways.

Manuel Castells (2001) argues that the Internet will enable new combinations of work and self-employment, individual expression, collaboration and sociability. For political activists, it will be possible for networks of individuals to combine and cooperate to spread their message around the world. For example, social networking sites such as Twitter, Bebo and Facebook, along with video sharing sites such as YouTube, show just how popular web-based communications are becoming for all age groups. Playing on McLuhan's idea that 'the medium is the message', Castells maintains that, now, 'the network is the message'.

Castells's work is discussed in more detail in chapter 19, 'Organizations and Networks'.

THINKING CRITICALLY

How important do you think the Internet is likely to become? In what ways is it built into the everyday routines of individuals, businesses, workplaces and retailing? On balance, is the Internet a positive development for both individuals and societies?

Film

The first movie to be shown to paying customers was in 1895 in Paris, France, where the Lumière brothers' *Arrival of the Train in La Ciotat Station* caused viewers to flee their seats as the screen slowly filled with an oncoming steam engine heading towards them. While the print media developed slowly over many decades, film and the cinema arrived much faster. The first cinema in the UK opened in 1896 and by 1914 there were more than 500 in London alone. Cinema tickets could be afforded by all classes, and the decline in working hours and rise in unemployment in the late 1920s meant the cinema-goers soon formed a mass audience in developed countries.

By 1925, the vast majority of commercially successful films were American in origin. They still are, as table 18.1 demonstrates. Cinemas were increasingly controlled by the American studios, which owned the distribution rights to films. The studios could oblige cinemas to bulk-buy future productions, effectively freezing out competitors. As with the print media, ownership had become concentrated largely among a few large corporations. The obvious dominance of American film production, partly the result of its large domestic market, raises questions about 'cultural imperialism', as American values, products and culture are promoted through the worldwide distribution of film.

There are different ways to assess the globalization of cinema. One is to consider *where* films are produced and the sources of financing that support them. By such criteria, there has unquestionably been a process of globalization in the cinema industry. According to studies by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), many nations possess the capacity to produce films. However, only a small handful of countries – the United States, India, Nigeria and Hong Kong – dominate global film production (UNESCO 2009b).

Another criterion used to assess globalization is the extent to which nationally produced films are *exported* to other countries. In the



Bollywood – one part of the Indian cinema industry – produces more films than Hollywood, and about a billion more tickets a year are sold for Indian films than for Hollywood blockbusters. Yet US films are still better known around the world and can take in about fifty times as much revenue.

1920s, Hollywood made four-fifths of all films screened in the world. But in 2006, India, with its growing Bollywood film productions, produced more films than any other country (1,091); Nigeria's 'Nollywood' was in second place (872) and the United States third (485) (UNESCO 2009b). However, many Indian and Nigerian films are not shown internationally and, although governments of many countries provide subsidies to their own film industries, the USA continues to be the largest exporter of film. As table 18.1 shows, the top-grossing films of all time worldwide are all American produced.

Hollywood studios generate well over half of their revenues from the overseas distribution of films. In an effort to increase the size of foreign audiences further, these studios

are involved in building multiplex cinemas around the world. Global box-office revenues rose to \$31.8 billion in 2010, nearly double the 1995 total, as the audiences increased (Bloomberg 2011). The spread of video and more recently DVD players has also increased the number of people who are now able regularly to watch films.

The digital revolution is rapidly transforming the filmmaking process. Conventionally, movies were produced by the analogue recording of images and associated sound onto celluloid film strips, which could then be cut and spliced in an editing suite to produce the final version. Today, more and more films are recorded in digital files that can much more easily be manipulated and changed, while cinemas are converting to

Table 18.1 Top-grossing films of all time worldwide, at box office, as at 16 August 2011

	Year	Country of origin	Total gross revenue (US \$ millions)
1 Avatar	2009	USA	2,782
2 Titanic	1997	USA	1,835
3 Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2	2011	USA	1,216
4 The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King	2003	USA	1,119
5 Transformers: Dark of the Moon	2011	USA	1,071
6 Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest	2006	USA	1,066
7 Toy Story 3	2010	USA	1,063
8 Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides	2011	USA	1,025
9 Alice in Wonderland	2010	USA	1,023
10 The Dark Knight	2008	USA	1,002

Source: Internet Movie Database (2011).

digital projection, which will eventually finish off the age of celluloid. The film director George Lucas pointed out that, for his Star Wars movie *The Revenge of the Sith* (2005), some 95 per cent was computer designed and animated (Kolker 2009: 249).

As digital technology advances, filmmaking is becoming possible for many more amateurs, who are able to create their own movies, edit them and make them available online via file-sharing websites such as YouTube. Critics may question the quality of this 'do-it-yourself' output. However, in accord with the ongoing digital revolution in other media forms, the technology has a certain democratizing potential, enabling people who might previously have remained passive consumers to become active producers – something that would have been unthinkable just twenty years ago.

Television

The interaction between television and the audience is different to that between the cinema and its audience. Television enters the household in a way that the cinema cannot and does not demand the same level of attention. Television also has an immediacy which film does not: it can report events, as in the

terrorist attacks in the USA in September 2001, as they happen from almost anywhere in the world to a mass audience.

The number of television sets in the developed countries and the amount of time that people spend viewing them increased dramatically from the 1950s onwards. If current trends in TV watching continue, the average child born today will have spent more time watching television by the age of eighteen than in any other pursuit except sleep. Virtually every household now possesses a TV set. Most people will watch television at some point every day, and the average set is switched on for between three and six hours per day. Individuals aged four and over in the UK watch an average of about twenty-six hours of television a week. Older people watch more than twice as much as children, perhaps because they are not in school and go to bed later in the evening (figure 18.4). Those in the lower social classes watch more than those from the top three social classes.

Television and social life

Television is ubiquitous and so ingrained into the routines of everyday life that most people simply take it for granted as part of social life as such. We watch TV, talk about it with

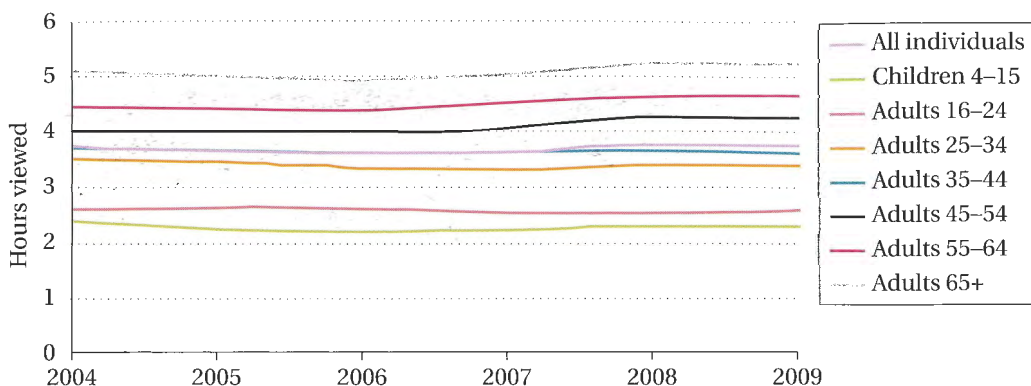


Figure 18.4 Average hours of television viewing per day, by age, all UK homes, 2004–9

Source: Ofcom (2010: 160).

friends and family, and organize our leisure time around TV programmes. The 'box in the corner' is switched on while we get on with other things and appears to provide an essential backdrop to our lives. As Roger Silverstone (1994: 3) explains:

Television accompanies us as we wake up, as we breakfast, as we have our tea and as we drink in bars. It comforts us when we are alone. It helps us sleep. It gives us pleasure, it bores us and sometimes it challenges us. It provides us with opportunities to be both sociable and solitary. Although, of course, it was not always so and although we have had to learn how to incorporate the medium into our lives we now take television entirely for granted.

It is the way in which television contributes to people's emotional and cognitive needs and assists in designing the routines and habits that create a stronger sense of trust in others, or 'ontological security' (Giddens 1991a), that helps to explain its all-pervading existence. However, none of this means that the dominant position of TV is inevitable or unassailable; the technological dimension of television does not determine its social and cultural reception. As 'Using your sociological imagination 18.1' shows, young people's everyday routines and habits today may well be significantly different from those of their

parents, with significant consequences for the medium of television.

Several media theorists have been highly critical about the effects of a seemingly ever-increasing diet of television. Neil Postman (1931–2003), in his tellingly titled *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1986), says that television presents serious issues as entertainment because, in his phrase, 'the form excludes the content'. By this, he means that television as 'the form' is a medium that is incapable of sustaining serious 'content'. For Postman, rational argument is best carried on in the form of the printed word, which is capable of sustaining complex and serious content. He harks back to the nineteenth century as an 'age of reason', when the written word was dominant.

Postman's argument has some similarities with Marshall McLuhan's claim that 'the medium is the message', although Postman is much more sceptical than McLuhan about the benefits of electronic media. To Postman, the medium of print creates a rational population, whereas the medium of television creates an entertained one. In a society dominated by television, news, education and politics are all reduced to entertainment, so that, as the book title indicates, we are simply 'amusing ourselves to death'.

In a similar vein, Robert Putnam (1995) has argued that, in the USA, the significant

decline in social capital – mutual obligations and trust – correlates pretty well with the rise of the television. TV viewing, he argues, is strongly and negatively related to social trust and group membership. One reason for this is the effect of programme content on viewers. For example, heavy watchers of TV tend to be sceptical about the benevolence of other people – by overestimating crime rates, for instance. Putnam concludes that the erosion of America's social capital was only recognized decades after the process had begun.

However, television watching habits are changing, particularly among younger people, as 'on-demand' services become more popular, Internet use increases and video-sharing websites, such as YouTube, provide interactive ways of viewing. Many social networking websites, such as MySpace and Facebook, which have grown enormously over recent years, may also show that Putnam's thesis is too pessimistic. There is some evidence that young people are beginning to favour more interactive forms of media and, if so, it is likely to mean changes in television production and output as well.

Putnam's thesis on the decline of social capital is examined in more detail in chapter 19, 'Organizations and Networks'.

On the other hand, television remains very popular. Sonia Livingstone and Moira Bovill's (1999) survey of children's media use in the UK – the first for forty years – found a developing 'bedroom culture', with two out of three working-class children and 54 per cent of middle-class children having a TV in their bedroom. By 2009, around 77 per cent of all five- to sixteen-year-olds had their own TV in the bedroom, 56 per cent of which were multi-channel sets. Such personal ownership by children is not restricted to TV, though, as 73 per cent also had their own mobile phone and 69 per cent had a DVD player, MP3 player and games console, while 55 per cent had their own laptop or PC (Livingstone 2009). By

contrast, in other parts of Europe, children's TV ownership is much lower.

Livingstone (2009: vi) further reports that, in the UK, 79 per cent of seven- to sixteen-year-olds had Internet access at home and 53 per cent of five- and six-year-old children were used to going online; 37 per cent of five- to sixteen-year-olds also had Internet access in their own bedrooms.

The Internet generated initial excitement as a means of establishing 'pen-pal' type relationships in other countries, but young people reported frustration in accessing useful information and said it was expensive. Books fared even worse; they were seen as boring, old-fashioned and not trendy, requiring too much effort – the sort of things 'your parents approve of' (Livingstone and Bovill 1999). Much has happened in the ten years since the original report, of course, not least the continuing growth in Internet users and the rapid expansion of mobile phone ownership. However, the continuing popularity of TV, as the researchers suggest, seems to be rooted in its ability to provide a broad range of 'gratifications': excitement, overcoming boredom, relaxation and overcoming the threat of feeling 'left out'.

Digital television

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, television broadcasting technology has undergone a revolution, with the transfer of programme transmission from analogue to digital. Analogue TV is the 'old' system of broadcasting, used to transmit signals to television sets around the country since the 1940s. It converts sound and pictures into waves, which are transmitted through the air and picked up by the aerial on the roof of a house or on top of the television. Digital TV works by transforming pictures and sound into information that is potentially understood by a computer.

Digital transmissions are received in three ways: through the TV aerial and a decoder (often a set-top box), via a satellite dish or via cable. The television acts like a computer and converts this information back into pictures and sound. Digital TV offers the possibility

18.1 Is the Internet killing television?

In August 2010, the end of the age of television as we know it was widely predicted. The US pay-TV market had suffered its first ever drop in subscribers. In the end the economy was roundly found to blame, with cable packages being sacrificed as families were forced to tighten their belts. But some commentators pointed to this as the inevitable result of the growth of on-demand and over the top offerings available on the internet.

So is technology killing what we think of as traditional television – and taking pay-TV operators with it? It's a confusing picture. Nielsen, who track US television viewing habits, have reported a drop in television ownership – albeit from 98.9% to 96.7%. DVD sales are falling, while Netflix recently overtook cable operator Comcast to become the biggest subscription video service in North America. IMS Research however is predicting digital cable TV subscribers in the US will increase by 7.8m between 2010 and 2015.

YouTube, Hulu, iPlayer, Netflix and other 'over the top' (OTT) services, not to mention illegal downloading, all offer alternatives. Apple and Google have both launched OTT services that let consumers play online content through their televisions, although Google's service is only available in the US. We're watching more video than ever before this way. But we're also watching more television. What is less clear is where the broadcast industry is ultimately headed.

Ask the experts

So what do those in the industry think lies in store? Neil Gaydon is the chief executive of pay-TV technology developer Pace. They manufacture set-top boxes and other technology for some of the world's biggest cable and satellite operators. He points to a rise in subscription figures over the last two quarters as proof that pay TV is healthier than ever. 'All the latest evidence is zero cord-cutting [using devices like laptops and tablets instead of TV sets] – and actually all over the top is doing is providing other services', he

says. 'And if you look at TV viewing figures, it's the highest it's ever been.' He also points to what he sees as the failure of Apple TV and Google TV to take off. 'The challenge to pay-TV is greatly exaggerated – OTT has certainly pointed to the desire people have to watch what they want, when they want.'

Mr Gaydon doesn't see pay-TV standing still. In his view, OTT has sounded a wake-up call to operators to develop hybrid services. 'The set-top box will morph into a media gateway', he says. 'If you fast-forward, and you think about the home of the future, you will have to have a hub, a media gateway, some form of device that's going to manage a suite of services.'

On demand

Not everyone is quite so confident the set-top box will survive the change. Suranga Chandratillake is the founder of blinkx, a video search engine and aggregator. 'Every device will have an internet connection as standard, that's increasingly the case already. I think set-top boxes are a temporary business at this stage', he says. Despite this, Mr Chandratillake is not predicting the end of television as we know it. 'I think that the device will live on, I think that we'll continue to have large screen devices whether we call them TVs or not. But while linear will remain popular, I think you will see massive growth in on demand. I don't know to what extent these two things are cannibalistic.'

The success of services like Netflix, he says, is proof consumers are willing to pay for reasonably priced services. 'I think partly we'll pay for it through small upgrades to our satellite, cable or broadband bills. The other way is through advertising – there'll be software or cloud services, you'll use a lot of them for free, but you'll be shown ads in the middle of them. I think though there are certain aspects of linear consumption that will remain with us. We'll all still watch the World Cup final at the same time.'

Source: Adapted from Graham (2011).

THINKING CRITICALLY

How reliable are the interviewees cited above? In what ways could they be biased? Where do you watch TV and how do you watch – live or ‘on demand’? Do you do other things while ‘watching’ and, if so, what? How do you see your viewing habits changing in the next few years?

of interactive television, the Internet, home shopping and home banking. The arrival of digital TV has also created the possibility of single units that merge the personal computer with the television, although these are not yet widely in use.

Digital television has largely replaced analogue in many developed countries, and the demise of analogue TV can be expected to proceed rapidly. The number of television channels available has increased as a result of advances in satellite, cable and digital technology. It is now not unusual to see digital service providers offering monthly subscription packages that give viewers the choice of a staggering 200+ TV and radio channels. Analogue TV in the UK provided just five. This increase extends more opportunities for TV content providers and, crucially, for advertisers, while the advent of pay-per-view and monthly subscription is likely to increase the amount that consumers spend in the future. Of course, the originality, creativity and quality of what they will be watching are another matter entirely.

THINKING CRITICALLY

‘The introduction of digital television genuinely represents more choice for viewers.’ In what ways do you think this statement is true? What evidence and arguments are there which suggest that this ‘choice’ is illusory rather than real?

Music

Music is as old as human societies and its use pre-dates the development of complex languages. The first music is assumed to have

come from the human voice, with instruments developing later along with different forms of material culture. Some of the oldest musical instruments have been found in parts of India and China and some of the earliest functional uses of music were in religious rituals and practices. But while these rituals and practices have tended to diminish in modern societies, music has continued to flourish.

Theodor Adorno (1976 [1950]) of the Frankfurt School of critical theory argued that musical forms tend to reflect the society within which they exist. Many musical forms in industrial capitalist societies, for example, take on predictable structures and offer easy gratification. They train people to expect uniformity and repetition, and they require little effort on the part of the listener to be enjoyed. In his own time, Adorno saw jazz and other popular music as guilty of this. However, although music can promote conformity, it can also foster critical enlightenment and is therefore, at least potentially, an active force in social life. Some forms of ‘progressive’ music (such as the experimental music of Schoenberg) defy standard musical conventions and, in ‘breaking the rules’, challenge people’s assumptions and force them to think more critically.

See chapter 3, ‘Theories and Perspectives’, for discussion of the Frankfurt School.

Like Adorno, the music theorist Jacques Attali, in *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (1985), argues that music holds up a mirror to society, as its social organization and forms reflect society’s mode of organization. For example, in industrialized societies, music is

listened to primarily in recorded form, via vinyl records, cassette tapes and, latterly, CDs and digital downloads. Music's hallmark in such societies is therefore repetitive mass production and the erosion of difference. Music becomes background noise in supermarkets, railway stations, restaurants and many other public and private spaces. Echoing Max Weber's comments on music in the bureaucratic age, Attali notes that the endless repetition of recorded music reflects the industrial society that enabled it.

However, Attali's thesis goes one step further. He maintains that music not only *mirrors* social organization, it also carries a *prophecy* of the future. Music can do this, he says, because musicians rapidly explore and exhaust all the possibilities within a given code (the 'rules of the game', as it were) much more quickly than in other forms of cultural output. Music is not bound so much to material things such as projectors or TV sets, but can be passed on and changes more quickly. As musical organization is pushed to its internal limits, it is forced to break the bounds of the existing system in order to continue moving forward. An example is the current battle over downloading and free sharing of copyrighted music. The commercial element of music-making is desperately struggling to keep pace with an emergent form which continually pushes and breaks the existing commercial 'rules of the game'.

What Attali saw emerging from industrialized music was a form of music-making based on the erosion of boundaries between the composer, the performer and the audience. Instead, people were starting to make music for their own and their friends' pleasure, with little or no commercial motivation. Music was becoming, once again, localized and made for smaller communities of people. The paradox of Attali's argument is that the movement towards the localization of music is occurring at a time when we seem to be caught up in a much more rapid globalization of the world's societies.

In contrast to such large-scale social structural theories, the 1970s and 1980s saw the

emergence of a new approach, known as the 'production of culture' perspective (Peterson 1976; Becker 1982). Here, music and other cultural products are viewed as social activities that have to be analysed in relation to the processes and contexts in which they are produced.

For example, Peterson and Berger (1975) studied pop music by looking at 'Number 1' hits in the USA between 1948 and 1973, comparing the number of performers and lyrics. They found that competition between large and small recording companies in the production of music was a key factor in explaining innovations. In periods of high market concentration (when just four companies produced some 75 per cent of all hit singles), there was little innovation because there was no need to look for novelty or to introduce new products. However, as the large companies lost their monopoly on radio promotion of music and smaller companies were able to gain a foothold, innovation increased.

What Peterson and Berger were able to show through their careful analysis of how pop music is *actually produced* (the production of culture) is that innovation and increasing diversity *followed* changes in market concentration, they did not lead it. Thus, innovation was to do less with the creative genius or powerful consumers demanding new music and more with the prevailing conditions of the music industry (see also Negus 1999).

Music is also part of people's self and life experiences and often becomes embedded within their historical memories. For example, Tia DeNora's *Music in Everyday Life* (2000) adopts an interactionist approach, exploring the way individuals use music in the construction of the self and personal experience. Music is not only something to be used, she argues, it can also influence people's actions. For instance, a routine car journey to the shops can easily become a secondary aim to listening to music on the car radio. Hearing a particular opening chord or melody can reorientate people's actions, turning them away from their previous course.

DeNora asserts that people often behave



For many, perhaps most, people, music forms part of their self-perception and identity formation.

rather like disc jockeys to their own selves, choosing music to create or change their mood and to alter the way they experience social life. And though sociology has lagged behind other disciplines, such as psychology, in the academic study of music, DeNora (2000: x) notes that music is 'a dynamic material, a medium for making, sustaining and changing social worlds and activities', though this cannot be understood in the abstract and has to be explored within the different contexts in which music is used. In this way, empirical studies could bring together the structural sociological theories of music and individual experience of it in order to enhance our understanding of its 'social powers'. DeNora's book is based on in-depth interviews with women in the USA and the UK and participant observation of 'music in action' in aerobics classes, karaoke evenings and music therapy sessions

in retail settings, but it also contributes to theories of music in society.

Globalization and the digitization of music

David Held and his colleagues (1999: 351) have argued that 'the musical form is one that lends itself to globalization more effectively than any other'. This is because music is able to transcend the limitations of written and spoken language to reach and appeal to a mass audience. The global music industry, dominated by a small number of multinational corporations, has been built on its ability to find, produce, market and distribute the musical abilities of thousands of artists to audiences around the world. Over recent decades, an 'institutional complex' of companies has developed as part of the global marketing and distribution

of music. Direct music downloads via the Internet is the present state of the art practice.

The global industry in recorded music is one of the most concentrated. The four largest companies – EMI, Universal, Warner and Sony/BMG – control between 80 and 90 per cent of all music sales internationally (Herman and McChesney 1997). The global music industry experienced substantial growth during the mid-1990s, with sales in developing countries particularly strong, prompting many of the top companies to sign up more local artists in anticipation of further market growth. However, the industry was challenged by the arrival of the Internet, which allows users (illegally) to share music for free and to produce and disseminate their own music without the need for large corporations.

The growth of the global music industry in the postwar period was primarily a result of the success of popular music – originating mainly in America and Britain – and the spread of youth cultures that identify with it (Held et al. 1999). Processes of globalization have therefore been one of the main forces in the diffusion of American and British styles and music genres to international audiences. The USA and the UK are the world leaders in the export of popular music, with other countries having much lower levels of domestic music production. While some critics contend that their domination of the music industry undermines the success of local musical sounds and traditions, it is important to remember that globalization is a contested concept. The growing popularity of ‘world music’ – such as the phenomenal success of Latin-inspired sounds in the USA – shows that globalization may lead to cultural diffusion in more than one direction.

Although the music industry has become more concentrated, it has proved vulnerable to Internet file-sharing and illegal downloads. If Internet distribution does not need a complex production and distribution network of shops, factories and warehouses, what will be left of the music business? In 2000, the record industry filed several lawsuits against the small company behind Napster – a software

program that allows people to trade files over the Internet – forcing it to stop providing the software. However, since an initial victory, the industry body has had mixed fortunes in court. In 2003, a US judge ruled that two file-swapping networks, Grokster and Morpheus, were not responsible for the legal status of files traded on their systems. But then, in 2005, the US Supreme Court said that Grokster could be sued for helping people to break the law, and the service was closed down.

In 2003, the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) sued 261 individuals for music piracy, finding that, on average, each had downloaded about 1,000 songs. A landmark case in 2007 saw a single individual – Jammie Thomas from Minnesota – taken to court for music-sharing online. In 2009, Thomas was found guilty of copyright violation on twenty-four songs, and the companies involved were awarded \$1.92 million. This was reduced to \$54,000 in 2010, but no agreement could be reached, and the RIAA asked for a third trial. However, in 2008 the RIAA dropped charges against thirty-five other people, saying that it would look to reach agreements with service providers to control piracy, persuading them to cancel the accounts of illegal file-sharers (Biagi 2011).

Wikström (2009) argues that the digital music revolution is characterized by three central features: connectivity, music as a service and amateur production. First, while the ‘old’ music industry centred on corporate control of music to maximize revenue, the new digital business is about *connectivity* – the links between producers and their audience. The Internet has (potentially) enabled everyone in the producer–audience network to upload music, not merely passively to receive it. This means the new industry is high in connectivity but low in producer control. Second, the old industry was based on sales of physical products such as vinyl records, cassettes and CDs, but the digital industry shifts to the provision of *access to music services*. As soon as music is uploaded onto the World Wide Web it becomes freely available, thus severely reducing its commercial value. However, people

18.2 'Free' music and copyright infringement in the Internet age

Because of the Internet, music can be shared globally in an instant, which is a huge benefit for artists and consumers. Yet the Internet also makes music piracy so easy that many people consider it a harmless act, and the economic implications for recording artists are substantial. In 2007 RIAA [Recorded Music Association of America] estimated the industry had lost nearly £1 billion in revenue just from illegal music downloads. In 2009, RIAA announced that music sales were down 18 per cent worldwide from 2007 to 2008 – the lowest level ever. In 2010, RIAA estimated that 'globally only one of 20 downloads is authorized, and online piracy rates in many markets is in the vicinity of 99 per cent.'

No industry could survive for long on such a rapid loss of income. So the recording companies have no choice but to pursue copyright infringement wherever they find it. Licenced music is governed by national and international copyright law, and the recording industry continues to aggressively pursue all the legal remedies available to curtail illegal music downloads in the United States and reduce piracy, especially overseas. The industry, of course, also encourages all legal music download services, such as iTunes, and subscription sites, such as Spotify.

By April 2008, the iTunes store had become the largest music retailer in the United States. By 2010, according to Apple, customers had downloaded 10 billion songs. Spotify has 7 million users in Britain, Spain, France, Sweden, Norway and Finland. Because of the Internet, music artists today can find a bigger audience than Thomas Edison [inventor of the phonograph or 'record player' in 1877] could ever have imagined – through music downloads and subscription services. However, the music business cannot escape the challenges of the Internet. The recording companies must learn how to produce music consumers want to hear using a format and/or a service they're willing to buy.

Source: Biagi (2011: 106).

THINKING CRITICALLY

Given the enormous numbers of people who have illegally downloaded music, what reasons can you offer as to why they do it? Do they see the existing copyright system as unfair on end users, for example? Should music piracy be de-criminalized, pursued with more vigour or is there another solution to this problem?

may still be prepared to pay for services that help them to find what they want amid the vast amount of online music.

Third, music audiences today can become *amateur producers*, creatively remixing their favourite professionally recorded music and publishing online. If these amateur producers are also the ones who attend concerts and buy merchandise, then it is in the interests of music companies not to challenge them or their practices, but to work with and encourage them (Wikström 2009: 7–8). What Wikström (and 'Using your sociological imagination 18.2') describes are some of the practical realities, conflicts and trade-offs as digitiza-

tion transforms the music industry in ways suggested by Attali's theoretical ideas, which we introduced above.

The corporate music industry is trying to come to terms with the consequences of digitization. Global music sales have been falling, with annual record sales down from \$40 billion (£22 billion) in 2000 to \$17 billion by 2009 (Gammons 2011: xix). The sector has undergone large-scale redundancies and been forced to restructure. Many in the music industry claim that the swapping of music files, such as MP3s, over the Internet is one of the major causes of lost revenue. Research by the British Phonographic Industry found

that 8 million people in the UK claim to be downloading music, 92 per cent of them using illegal sites (BBC 2005). Although attempts are being made to impose tighter controls on the replication of legally purchased music, the pace of technological change eclipses the industry's ability to curtail piracy (see 'Using your sociological imagination 18.2').

The music industry has also begun to adapt by offering *legal* download services – Spotify being the most notable example to date. This downloading is legal because royalties are paid on the songs to record labels and artists. The Internet has seen a large increase in downloads, catalysed by the advent of the portable MP3 player, particularly Apple's iPod, and more online companies offering songs. By the end of 2004, more than 125 million legal downloads of songs had been purchased and an official 'music download chart' had been established (BBC 2004b). After the music industry's initial rejection of the Internet, by the mid-2000s its successful adaptation is now perceived to be crucial to its future.

Newspapers

The development of the press during the nineteenth century occurred at a time of political and social unrest in Europe. The UK government, for example, exerted its control over the emerging newspaper industry through strict laws on libel and sedition, which prevented political agitation; at the same time, a stamp tax was imposed to ensure that newspapers could be afforded only by the well off. The stamp tax had unintended consequences, as illegal and inexpensive pamphlets, such as William Cobbett's weekly *Political Register* emerged, spreading radical views among the newly industrial working class (Dyck 1992).

The stamp tax – condemned by its opponents as a 'tax on knowledge' – was finally repealed in 1855 after a series of reductions, leading many writers to hail a golden era of British journalism marked by a 'transition from official to popular control' (Koss 1973). An alternative view is put forward by James Curran and Jean Seaton (2003), who argue that

the repeal of the stamp tax was an attempt to break the popularity of the radical press and to boost the sales of more 'respectable' newspapers. The repeal of the stamp tax introduced not a new era of press freedom, but a time of repression and ideological control, this time by market forces rather than government.

The newspaper was a fundamentally important development in the history of modern media, because it packaged many different types of information in a limited and easily reproducible format. Newspapers contained, in a single package, information on current affairs, entertainment and consumer goods. The cheap daily press was pioneered in the United States with the 'one-cent daily' paper in New York. The invention of cheap newsprint was the key to the mass diffusion of newspapers from the late nineteenth century onwards.

By the early twentieth century, ownership of much of the UK newspaper industry was concentrated in the hands of a few rich entrepreneurs. By the 1930s, Lords Beaverbrook, Camrose, Kemsley and Rothermere owned 50 per cent of British national and local daily papers and 30 per cent of the Sunday papers. Critics have claimed that the 'press barons', as they became known, used their ownership of national newspapers to promote their own political causes and ambitions (Curran and Seaton 2003).

For half a century or more, newspapers were the chief way of conveying information quickly and comprehensively to a mass public. But their influence waned with the rise of radio, cinema and – much more importantly – television and, increasingly, the Internet. Figures for newspaper readership suggest that the proportion of people who read a national daily paper in Britain has declined since the early 1980s. At the end of the twentieth century, among men, those who read daily newspapers fell from 76 per cent in 1981 to 60 per cent in 1998–9; readership levels are lower among women, but a similar drop – from 68 per cent to 51 per cent – also took place (ONS 2000).

Newspapers, particularly the *tabloid* press (which targets a mass audience, in contrast



Despite the prevalence of digital media in today's society, newspapers remain extremely popular.

to the so-called *broadsheets*), have become focused less on providing news and more towards reporting, creating and sustaining a celebrity culture to combat falling circulation (Cashmore 2006). The role of newspapers and television in creating a climate in which celebrity culture can flourish alerts us to what some sociologists, following the 'production of culture' approach (discussed below), have called the 'celebrity industry' (Turner 2004). But what is a celebrity? In the early 1960s, Daniel Boorstin (1961: 58) noted that 'the celebrity is a person who is well known for their well-knownness'. Although many celebrities today are film stars or sportspeople, they may be known more for their media personalities and private lives than for their achievements. Others become celebrities just by regularly making it into magazines and newspapers (Paris Hilton) or appearing on

television (*Big Brother* and other reality show contestants).

Of course, the celebrity culture in newspapers and on television requires an appreciative and demanding audience. As consumers, we also participate in the production of celebrity culture, and we do it in knowing ways (Gamson 1994). We know that many of our celebrities have no major achievements to offer and that their fame will probably be short-lived. When we get bored with them, we simply move on to the next one. In this way, celebrities have become commodities for our consumption – not literally, but via their media representations. Nonetheless, despite the apparent public addiction to celebrity, the continuing decline in newspaper sales indicates that celebrity news will probably not be enough to save conventional newspapers.

Indeed, online communication might well

bite further into newspaper circulation. News information and celebrity gossip is now available online via numerous websites almost instantaneously and is constantly updated during the course of the day. Many newspapers themselves can also be accessed and read online free of charge. In the longer term it would seem that the age of paper-based newspapers may be drawing to a close, but newspaper companies are already diversifying their output into new media forms in order to survive.

THINKING CRITICALLY

Do you think that paper-based newspapers can survive the Internet revolution? How could the newspaper business change, and what new practices could it adopt, to maximize its opportunities of gaining and holding on to readers?

Theorizing the media

In this section we examine four influential theoretical approaches to the study of the mass media: functionalism, conflict theory, symbolic interactionism and recent post-modern media theory. As we will see, there are widely divergent views on the role and functions of the media within societies, and our fourfold categorization here is not an exhaustive one in the field of media studies.

Functionalism

In the mid-twentieth century, functionalist theorists focused on the ways in which the media help to integrate and bind societies together. Following the media theorist Denis McQuail (2000), we can identify several important social functions of the media that may work to stabilize the social system.

- 1 *Information* The media provide us with a continuous flow of information about our society and the world, from webcams and

radio reports alerting us to traffic jams, to rolling weather reports, the stock market, and news stories about issues that might affect us personally.

- 2 *Correlation* The media explain and help us to understand the meaning of the information they give us. In this way they provide support for established social norms and have an important role in the socialization of children, contributing a shared framework for the interpretation of events.
- 3 *Continuity* The media have a certain function in expressing the dominant culture, recognizing new social developments and forging common values.
- 4 *Entertainment* The media provide amusement and a diversion from work and reduce social tensions. This is essentially the function of a release valve for society, allowing people to set aside their problems and conflicts, at least temporarily.
- 5 *Mobilization* The media can be used to encourage people to contribute to economic development, to support and uphold moral rules, and to mobilize the population in times of war. This can be through very direct public campaigns, but also in subtle ways, such as the moral tales within soap operas or films.

In recent decades, functionalist theories of the media – along with the functionalist approach in general – have fallen into decline. There are several reasons why sociologists have moved away from functionalism. First, it appears to do little more than describe the media's current roles rather than explaining why these exist. Second, functionalist accounts have had little or nothing to say about the audience reception of media products, tending to assume that people are relatively passive rather than active interpreters of media messages. Third, the functions above appear wholly positive, but others have seen the media as a much less benign force. In particular, conflict approaches influenced by Marxism see the modern mass media as destructive of society's cultural vitality.

Functionalism was introduced in chapter 1, 'What is Sociology?', and discussed in chapter 3, 'Theories and Perspectives'.

Conflict theories

In Europe, conflict approaches to the mass media have had more impact than functionalism. Below, we look at two of the most important theories of the media from a broadly Marxist standpoint: the political economy approach, which concentrates on the ownership and control of media forms, and the 'culture industry' approach of the Frankfurt School of critical theory. The important research of the Glasgow University Media Group is also rooted in Marxist theory and is discussed below.

Political economy approaches

Political economy approaches view the media as an industry and examine the way in which the major means of communication have come to be owned by private interests. The ownership of the media has often been concentrated in the hands of a few wealthy media magnates. In the pre-war era of mass newspaper readership a handful of so-called press barons owned a majority of the press in many countries and were able to set the agenda for news and its interpretation. In our increasingly global age, the ownership of media crosses national borders and media magnates now own transnational media corporations, giving them international recognition and influence. Perhaps the best known of these is Australian-born Rupert Murdoch, the owner of Sky Digital, Fox Broadcasting Company and other media organizations.

Advocates of a political economy view argue that, as in other industries, economic interests in media ownership work to exclude those voices that lack economic power. Moreover, the voices that *do* survive are those that are least likely to criticize the prevailing distribution of wealth and power (Golding

and Murdock 1997). This view was famously advanced by the American linguist and radical writer Noam Chomsky (1991). Chomsky is highly critical of the dominance of large corporations over the American and global media and the tight control of information provided to the public. During the Cold War, for example, these corporations controlled information to create a climate of fear in the West about the Soviet Union. Since the collapse of the USSR in 1991, Chomsky maintains that corporately owned media have exaggerated people's fears of global terrorism. This prevents the airing and proper discussion of other issues that are, arguably, more significant, such as the unaccountability of corporations or the lack of democracy. Chomsky sees the mass media as disseminating propaganda in support of the ruling groups in society.

Ideology and bias in the media

The study of the media is closely related to the impact of ideology in society. Ideology refers to the influence of ideas on people's beliefs and actions. The concept has been widely used in media studies, but it has also been controversial. The word was first coined by a French writer, Destutt de Tracy, in the late 1700s. He used it to refer to a 'science of ideas', which he thought would be a branch of knowledge. De Tracy's view has been seen as a 'neutral' conception of ideology. Neutral conceptions discuss phenomena as being ideological, but this does not imply they are misleading or biased in favour of particular social classes or groups.

In the hands of later authors, however, 'ideology' was used in a more critical way. Karl Marx, for example, saw ideology as important in the reproduction of relations of class domination. Powerful groups are able to control the dominant ideas circulating in a society to justify their own position. Thus, according to Marx, religion is often ideological: it teaches the poor to be content with their lot. The social analyst should uncover the distortions of ideology to allow the powerless to gain a true perspective on their lives. Critical notions of ideology 'convey a negative,

critical or pejorative sense' and carry within them 'an implicit criticism or condemnation' (Thompson 1990: 53–4).

John Thompson argues that the critical notion is to be preferred, because it links ideology with power. Ideology is about the exercise of symbolic power – how ideas are used to hide, justify or legitimate the interests of dominant groups in the social order. In their studies, members of the Glasgow University Media Group (discussed in the 'Classic studies 18.1') analyse the ideological aspects of TV news reporting and how it systematically generates bias. For example, news reports on industrial disputes tend to favour government and management at the expense of striking workers. In general, Thompson claims that mass media – including not only the news but also all varieties of programme content and genre – greatly expand the scope of ideology in modern societies. They reach mass audiences and are, in his terms, based on 'quasi-interaction' – that is, audiences cannot answer back in a direct way.

In media and communication studies, a particular type of analysis – **discourse analysis** – has been widely used in the study of media products. Discourse analysts begin from the premise that language is a fundamental part of social life which is related to all other aspects, and, in that sense, all social science has to take account of language and its use (Fairclough 1992). Discourse analysis is used to examine texts of many kinds, though there are different versions of it (van Dijk 1997). For example, some studies engage in a detailed analysis of texts and documents, while others, drawing on Foucault's ideas, connect texts to social theories of society, exploring the way that discourses construct and shape social life itself. Fairclough argues that 'text analysis is an essential part of discourse analysis, but discourse analysis is not merely the linguistic analysis of texts' (2003: 3).

Texts can be newspaper articles and personal diaries, but they can also be transcripts of interviews, ethnographic conversations and focus groups, films, television programmes and web pages. *Discourses* are

'systems of thought' or ways of thinking about and discussing the world within a particular framework. Discourses erect boundaries around subjects, which limit what can sensibly be said about them.

The recent discourse on 'Islamic terrorism' sets the terms of debate for discussion of this phenomenon, ruling out alternative conceptions of those involved, as 'freedom fighters' or 'terrorists using Islam to justify their acts', for example. In *critical discourse analysis*, such discursive practices are linked to wider social structures of inequality and power relations, so that the ideological aspects can be identified and opened up for examination. According to Fairclough, 'language connects with the social through being the primary domain of ideology, and through being both a site of, and a stake in, struggles for power' (1989: 15). As we see in 'Classic studies 18.1', the work of the Glasgow University Media Group shows what critical content analysis can add to our understanding of news reporting in conflict situations.

The culture industry

Members of the Frankfurt School of critical theory (see chapter 3 for a discussion), such as Theodor Adorno (1903–69), were critical of the effects of mass media on the population and on culture. The Frankfurt School was established during the 1920s and 1930s and consisted of a loose group of theorists inspired by Marx, who nevertheless saw that the latter's views needed radical revision. Among other things, they argued that Marx had not given enough attention to the influence of culture in modern capitalist societies.

The members of the Frankfurt School argued that leisure time had effectively been industrialized. Their extensive studies of the 'culture industry' – such as the entertainment industries of film, TV, popular music, radio, newspapers and magazines – have been very influential in the field of cultural studies (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002 [1947]). They claimed that, in mass societies, the production of culture had become just as standardized and dominated by the desire for profit as in other industries. In a mass society, the

Classic Studies 18.1 The Glasgow University Media Group brings 'bad news'

The research problem

As we have seen, a substantial proportion of the population no longer reads newspapers. However, for many people, TV news is their key source of information about the world. Can it be trusted to give a true and accurate picture of events? Why would the news *not* provide accurate information? And what are the consequences for our understanding of the world around us if it does not?

Some of the best-known research studies concerned with television news have been those carried out by the Glasgow University Media Group in the UK. Over the last three decades, the group has published a series of studies that are highly critical of the presentation of the news. Their early studies, including *Bad News* (1976), *More Bad News* (1981), *Really Bad News* (1983) and *War and Peace News* (1985), were very influential, setting out a research strategy for critical content analysis. Their strategies were essentially similar in each of these studies, though they altered the focus of their investigations.

The Glasgow Group's explanation

Bad News (Glasgow University Media Group 1976), their first and most influential book, was based on an analysis of TV news broadcasts between January and June 1975 on the three UK terrestrial channels available at that time. The objective was to provide a systematic and dispassionate analysis of the content of the news and the ways in which it was presented. *Bad News* concentrated on the portrayal of industrial disputes, while the later books concentrated more on political coverage, including the Falklands War of 1982.

The conclusion of *Bad News* was that reporting of industrial relations was typically presented in a selective and biased fashion. Terms such as 'trouble', 'radical' and 'pointless strike' suggested anti-union views. The effects of strikes, causing disruption for the public, were much more likely to be reported on than their underlying or immediate causes. Film material that was used very often made the activities of protesters appear irrational and aggressive.

For example, film of strikers stopping people entering a factory would focus on any confrontations that occurred, even if they were infrequent.

Bad News also pointed out that those who construct the news act as 'gatekeepers' for what gets onto the agenda – in other words, what the public hears about at all. Strikes in which there were active confrontations between workers and management, for instance, might get widely reported, while more consequential and long-lasting industrial disputes might be largely ignored. The views of news journalists, the Glasgow Group suggested, tend to reflect their middle-class backgrounds and supports the views of the dominant groups in society, who inevitably see strikers as dangerous and irresponsible.

In recent years, members of the Glasgow Group have carried out a range of further studies. *Bad News From Israel* (Philo and Berry 2004) examined television news reporting of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The study was carried out over a two-year period and was supported by several senior television news broadcasters and journalists who were involved in panel discussions with members of an 800-person sample audience. As well as looking at the television coverage of the conflict and its production, the authors were interested in how the coverage related to the understanding, beliefs and attitudes of the audience.

The research concluded that television news coverage of the conflict confused viewers and substantially featured Israeli government views. There was little devoted to the history or origins of the conflict which would have provided a relevant context, and there was a bias towards official 'Israeli perspectives', particularly on BBC 1, where Israelis were interviewed or reported more than twice as much as Palestinians. In addition, American politicians who supported Israel were often featured. The study found that the news gave a strong emphasis to Israeli casualties relative to Palestinians (although two to three times more Palestinians than Israelis died).

There were also differences in the language

used by journalists to describe Israeli and Palestinian attacks. Journalists would often describe Palestinian acts as 'terrorism', but when an Israeli group was reported as trying to bomb a Palestinian school they were referred to as 'extremists' or 'vigilantes' (Philo and Berry 2004). The message of this body of work is that news reporting can never be thought of as neutral or 'objective'. Rather, it reflects the unequal societies within which it exists and, as such, should be seen as systematically biased.

Critical points

The work of the Glasgow Media Group is much discussed in media circles as well as in the academic community. Some news producers accused the researchers of simply exercising their own biases, which lay with workers and strikers rather than with government and management. They pointed out that, while *Bad News* contained a chapter entitled 'The trade unions and the media', there was no chapter on 'management and the media'. This should have been discussed, because news journalists are often accused by management of bias against them in disputes, rather than against the strikers.

Academic critics made similar points. Martin Harrison (1985) gained access to transcripts of ITN news broadcasts for the period covered by the original 1976 study and argued that the five months were not typical. There was an abnormal number of days lost because of industrial action over the period and, as it would have been impossible for the news to report all of these, the tendency to focus on the more dramatic episodes was understandable.

In Harrison's view, the Glasgow Group was wrong to claim that news broadcasts

concentrated too much on the effects of strikes. After all, many more people are affected by strikes than take part in them. Sometimes millions of people find their lives disrupted by the actions of just a handful of people. Finally, according to Harrison's analysis, some of the assertions made by the group were simply false. For example, contrary to what the group stated, the news reports did normally name the unions involved in disputes and did say whether or not the strikes were official or unofficial.

Contemporary significance

The central point made in the Glasgow Group studies holds – that the news is never just a description of what 'actually happened'. It is a complex construction, and the process of construction regularly influences what 'the news' is. For example, when a politician appears on a news programme and makes a comment about a controversial issue – say, the state of the economy and what should be done about it – that comment itself becomes 'news' in subsequent programmes.

John Eldridge (1993), editor of one volume of the Glasgow Group's research, points out that what counts as objectivity in news reporting will always be difficult. Against those postmodernists who say that the idea of objectivity is irrelevant, Eldridge affirms the importance of continuing to look at media products with a critical eye. Accuracy in news reporting can and must be studied. After all, when the football results are reported, we expect them to be accurate. The work of the Glasgow Group forcefully reminds us that issues of truth and truthfulness are always involved in news reporting, and the latter is certainly a worthy subject for sociological research.

leisure industry was used to induce appropriate values among the public: leisure was no longer a break from work, but a preparation for it.

Members of the Frankfurt School maintained that the spread of the culture industry, with its undemanding and standardized prod-

ucts, undermined the capacity of individuals for critical and independent thought. Art disappears, swamped by commercialization – 'Mozart's Greatest Hits', for example, or student posters of the great works of art – and culture is replaced by simple and undemanding entertainment.



Does mass reproduction equal cultural destruction?

THINKING CRITICALLY

Do you think that the mass reproduction of great works of art devalues them? Why should a wall poster of da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* or Van Gogh's *The Starry Night* be described as 'undemanding' when the original is not? Is there a positive side to mass reproduction of this kind? Who benefits from it, if anyone?

Conflict theories remain popular in media studies, though they are subject to some of the same criticisms as functionalist theories. There is a tendency to assume that people are unable to resist media propaganda and are easy prey to it. Like functionalists, the early critical

theorists paid little or no attention to audiences and the reception of media messages, focusing instead on the production of culture. The Frankfurt School's damning critique of mass culture has also been seen as linked to their defence of the high culture – classical music, opera, painting and the arts – favoured by social elites (Swingewood 1977). This is somewhat paradoxical, of course, given the Marxist origins of critical theory. As we will see later, this distinction between high and 'low' or popular culture was seized upon and attacked by postmodern media theorists in the 1980s and 1990s.

Jürgen Habermas was one of several theorists to assert that the public sphere in society was in trouble (see the discussion of Habermas's ideas in 'Classic studies 18.2'). In *The Fall of Public Man* (2003 [1977]) Richard Sennett

Classic Studies 18.2 Jürgen Habermas on the rise and fall of the public sphere

The research problem

Modern democracies developed alongside the mass media, particularly newspapers and other types of publication. In a very real sense, the mass media enabled and encouraged democracy. And yet, today, the mass media are often seen negatively, as trivializing the democratic process and creating a climate of general hostility to politics itself. How did such a radical shift happen? Could it be reversed or are the mass media today inevitably failing democracies? The German philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas, one of the last influential intellectuals of the Frankfurt School, took up these questions in a series of important works.

Habermas's explanation

Habermas (1981, 1985, 1989 [1962]) developed themes from the Frankfurt School in different directions, based on his abiding interest in language and the process of democracy. He analysed the emergence and development of the mass media from the early eighteenth century to the present, tracing the creation and subsequent decay of the 'public sphere'. For Habermas, the **public sphere** is an arena of public debate in which issues of general concern can be discussed and opinions formed, which is necessary for effective democratic participation and oils the wheels of the democratic process.

According to Habermas, the public sphere developed in the salons and coffee houses of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century London, Paris and other European cities (see the depiction of a salon in chapter 1). People would meet to discuss issues of the moment, with political debate being a matter of particular importance. Although only small numbers of the population were involved in the salon cultures, Habermas argues that they were vital to the early development of democracy, primarily because the salons introduced the idea of resolving political problems through public discussion. The public sphere – at least in principle – involves individuals coming together as equals in a forum for public debate.

However, the promise offered by the early development of the public sphere has not been fully realized. Democratic debate in modern societies is now stifled by the development of the culture industry. The spread of mass media and mass entertainment causes the public sphere to become largely a sham. Politics is stage-managed in Parliament and the mass media, while commercial interests triumph over those of the public. 'Public opinion' is formed not through open, rational discussion any longer, but through manipulation and control – as, for example, in advertising. On the other hand, the spread of global media can put pressure on authoritarian governments to loosen their hold over state-controlled broadcasting outlets, and many 'closed' societies such as China are discovering that the media can become a powerful force in support of democracy.

Yet, as the global media become increasingly commercialized, they encroach on the public sphere in the way described by Habermas. Commercialized media are beholden to the power of advertising revenue and compelled to favour content that guarantees high ratings and sales. As a result, entertainment will necessarily triumph over controversy and debate, weakening citizen participation in public affairs and shrivelling the public sphere. The media, which promised so much, have now become part of the problem with democracy. Yet Habermas remains optimistic. He argues that it is still possible to envisage a political community beyond individual nation-states in which issues can be openly debated and where public opinion will influence governments.

Critical points

Habermas's ideas have been subject to an important critique. The salon culture that he holds up as an arena of civilized, rational debate was strictly limited to the higher social classes and was beyond the reach of the working class. In short, it was an elitist pastime that bore little real resemblance to the needs of mass democratic participation. Habermas's view that the modern mass media are destructive of the public sphere has also

been seen as misguided. As we will see below, John Thompson (1995) argues that the media actually enable *more* public debate by airing a variety of public matters and encouraging a wider discussion. The Internet, with its innumerable forums and chatrooms, is just the latest example of this.

Contemporary significance

Habermas's ideas have provoked a good deal of debate and much controversy. Currently, it

appears that they have lost some ground in the wake of critique from those who defend the mass media as, on balance, a positive force in society, but also from postmodern thinkers who see Habermas as working within the older Frankfurt tradition, with its fear and mistrust of the 'mass' public. There is some truth in such critiques. And yet, Habermas is a powerful reminder that the rational, modernist project that we can trace back to the Enlightenment still has much to offer sociological or social theories of the media.

sought to explain the origins of the separation of public and private spheres, arguing that these have become separated, both physically – with the separate development of residential housing estates, workplaces and leisure developments (including shopping arcades) – and philosophically, in the way we think about our distinct private lives, for example. However, over time, the private sphere has tended to canalize – take over – the public sphere, so that, for instance, politicians are now judged more on their personal characteristics, such as honesty and sincerity, than on their ability to perform public roles. And the advent of modern visual media, especially television, has led to a highly developed presentation of self by political figures aimed at matching such expectations of their personalities. Sennett sees this as destructive of an effective political life and representative of the fall of the dedicated public official.

However, there are some problems with the way the 'the public sphere' is presented and idealized in these accounts. The public sphere was constituted by excluding certain social groups, notably women, ethnic minorities and non-property owners, and, in being limited in this way, the notion of a public sphere allowed middle-class men to perceive themselves and their role and to present it to others as universal. Feminist scholars argue that Habermas did not pay enough attention to the *gendered* nature of the public sphere. In separating the public from the domestic, private sphere, many issues that were important for women

were simply excluded. As Nancy Fraser says, 'The view that women were excluded from the public sphere turns out to be ideological; . . . In fact, . . . the bourgeois public was never *the* public' (1992: 116).

This alerts us to another important point, namely that some 'publics' – such as women – were *intentionally* blocked from participating, demonstrating that conflictual social relations underpinned the idealized conception of a common public sphere. What critics suggest, therefore, is that the 'bourgeois concept' of the public sphere was a male-dominated one that helped to legitimize systematic social inequalities.

THINKING CRITICALLY

In what ways are social networking sites such as Twitter or Facebook similar to and different from the kind of salon culture discussed by Sennett and Habermas above? Is the conversation and discussion on such sites part of the contemporary public sphere? If it is, how representative of 'the public' are such sites? Who is likely to be excluded?

Symbolic interactionism

Interactionist media studies have not been as numerous as functionalist and conflict theories, though they have become more popular in recent years. Herbert Blumer's 1930s study

of the impact of cinema on the audience was an early attempt to allow people themselves to inform sociological understandings of media influence. Blumer asked 1,500 American high school and college students to record their experiences of watching films in 'autobiographies', which he presented in his book *Movies and Conduct* (1970 [1933]). Although pioneering in some ways, the study has been seen as rather naïve, both in believing that the respondents' views could 'speak for themselves' and in its rather simple approach to cinematic 'texts'.

Perhaps the most influential interactionist approach to the media is moral panic theory, which emerged out of the labelling perspectives of Charles Lemert and Howard Becker. Stan Cohen's (2003 [1972]) famous study of clashes between Mods and Rockers in the UK showed how exaggerated and sensational media representations contribute to recurring moral panics in society. Such panics serve to scapegoat social groups, including youth cultures and ethnic minorities, taking attention away from structural problems such as unemployment and economic recession.

See chapter 21, 'Crime and Deviance', for a discussion of the labelling perspective and also for a detailed discussion of moral panic theory, which you may want to refer to.

Drawing partly on the work of Habermas, John Thompson (1990, 1995) analysed the relationship between the media and industrial societies. From early forms of print through to electronic communication, Thompson argues, the media have played a central role in the development of modern institutions. The main founders of sociology – Marx, Weber and Durkheim – gave too little attention to the role of media in shaping even the early development of modern society.

Sympathetic to some of the ideas of Habermas, Thompson is also critical of him, as he is of the Frankfurt School and of Baudrillard's

postmodern position. The Frankfurt School's attitude to the culture industry was too negative. In common with the Frankfurt School, he says, too often Habermas tends to treat people as the passive recipients of media messages rather than active agents:

Media messages are commonly discussed by individuals in the course of reception and subsequent to it. . . . [They] are transformed through an ongoing process of telling and retelling, interpretation and reinterpretation, commentary, laughter and criticism. . . . By taking hold of messages and routinely incorporating them into our lives . . . we are constantly shaping and reshaping our skills and stocks of knowledge, testing our feelings and tastes, and expanding the horizons of our experience. (Thompson 1995: 42–3)

Thompson's theory of the media rests on a distinction between three types of interaction (see table 18.2). *Face-to-face* interaction, such as people talking at a party, is rich in the cues used by individuals to make sense of what others say (see Chapter 8, 'Social Interaction and Everyday Life'). *Mediated interaction* involves the use of a media technology – paper, electrical connections, electronic impulses, and so on. Characteristic of mediated interaction is that it is stretched out in time and space and goes way beyond the contexts of face-to-face interaction. Mediated interaction takes place between individuals in a direct way – say, two people talking on the telephone – but there is no opportunity for the same variety of non-verbal cues.

A third type of interaction is *mediated quasi-interaction*. This refers to the sort of social relations created by the mass media. Such interaction is stretched across time and space but does not link individuals directly – hence the term 'quasi-interaction'. The two previous types are 'dialogical': individuals communicate in a direct way. Mediated quasi-interaction is 'monological': a TV programme, for example, is a one-way form of communication. People watching the programme may discuss it and perhaps shout at the TV set – but, of course, it does not answer back.

Table 18.2 Types of interaction

<i>Interactional characteristics</i>	<i>Face-to-face interaction</i>	<i>Mediated interaction</i>	<i>Mediated quasi-interaction</i>
Space-time constitution reference system	Context of co-presence; shared spatial-temporal time and space	Separation of contexts; extended availability in time and space	Separation of contexts; extended availability in time and space
Range of symbolic cues	Multiplicity of symbolic cues	Narrowing of the range of symbolic cues	Narrowing of the range of symbolic cues
Action orientation	Oriented towards specific others	Oriented towards specific others	Oriented towards an indefinite range of potential recipients
Dialogical/monological	Dialogical	Dialogical	Monological

Source: Thompson (1995: 465).

Thompson's point is that all three types of interaction intermingle in our lives today and the media change the balance between the public and the private. Unlike Sennett and Habermas, though, Thompson argues that this shift brings *more* into the public domain than before, not less, and often leads to more debate and controversy. Postmodern theorists see things rather differently, with some considering that mediated quasi-interaction now dominates the other two types, with dramatic and negative consequences for social life.

It is the case that more people today appear on television to discuss moral and political issues on audience discussion shows, such as those of Oprah Winfrey in the USA or Jeremy Kyle in the UK, and in so-called reality television, such as *Big Brother*, *Wife Swap* and many others. In addition, millions of people watch at home and discuss their content at work, in pubs and in other gathering places. In the case of the global phenomenon *Big Brother*, audiences interact with the show, voting for evictions of participants and commenting in online forums and spin-off shows. But are such programmes really providing new public spaces for engagement in a vibrant public sphere, or is this just cheap and trashy TV for the masses?

In an empirical study of *audience discussion*

programmes, Livingstone and Lunt (1993) used a multi-method approach involving focus group discussions, individual interviews, textual analysis of the programmes and a survey questionnaire to gather the views of studio audiences and home viewers. They argue that these programmes deal with current issues as they affect people's everyday experiences, but they are not really documentaries and tend to 'construct' viewers as community members. Hence, audience discussion programmes do not easily fit into any existing TV genre (Gregori Signes 2000). As types of participation depend largely on the conventions of the genre involved, these programmes are particularly open and undefined. Some involve both lay people and experts sitting together while the host moves around with a microphone. In these shows, experts can be questioned and challenged, and thus made accountable. In this sense, they are public spaces for the exercise of democracy, and this is reinforced through the systematic prioritization of the lay rather than the expert perspective (Livingstone and Lunt 1993).

However, this positive conclusion can be questioned, as the study did not explore the 'interactional dynamics' of the actual discussions within the programmes (Hutchby 2005). This is an important criticism because the

issue of *who* speaks, and when, is a fundamental part of the shaping of conversations in particular directions. For example, audience discussions follow a certain formulaic progression, usually dominated and steered by the host, which means that the programmes may not be such open, public forums as they appear in audience and participants' accounts of them (Tolson 2005).

There have also been allegations of actors being hired and paid to take part in discussion programmes, such as that of Jerry Springer in the USA and Vanessa Feltz's show in the UK. The latter was cancelled in 1999 when it was revealed that an agency had been used to source several audience members. Such episodes are reminders of Neil Postman's argument that TV is primarily an *entertainment* medium, to which all of its other potentially useful functions are subordinated. No consensus has yet emerged among media scholars on which side of this debate is most strongly supported by the evidence.

THINKING CRITICALLY

How satisfactory is Thompson's threefold schema? Is television still 'monological', for example, or is it becoming more 'dialogical'? In what ways? Is Thompson's optimistic conclusion justified or are the mass media, on the whole, damaging to social life?

Postmodern theory

Since the publication of Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1985), sociology has had to contend with a set of ideas about science, knowledge and culture that are at odds with the progressive, modernist ideals of modern life since the Enlightenment period. Lyotard argued that the great metanarratives of modernity – scientific truth, progress and historical development – are now in decline. Science continues, but, in the wake of global warming and the loss of global biodiversity,

who now believes that it leads inexorably to a better life for all? Technologies develop and many of us can have smartphones, digital TVs and personal games consoles, but, in the light of continuing undernourishment, famine and wars, does anyone still believe that we are witnessing human progress? For postmodern thinkers such as Zygmunt Bauman (1992, 1997), the demise of such metanarratives may, in some ways, be a positive development. It means that we live in a period when people are forced to face our modernity head-on and with no more grand illusions. We live in a time of 'self-conscious modernity', which Bauman (and others) describe as **postmodernity**.

The postmodern world is one marked by a lack of certainty, a mixing and matching of styles and genres, and a playfulness in relation to cultural products. In pop music, there is the advent of sampling, the mixing of original tracks with new rhythms and rap, mash-ups – songs created by blending two or more recorded songs – and many more hybrid forms. In film, David Lynch's seminal *Blue Velvet* (1986) merged time periods and historical eras seamlessly, with vehicles from the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s driving the same 1980s streets. And, in art, postmodern trends reject the idea of a progressive 'avant-garde', instead mixing high and popular forms in playful 'post-progressive' ways. Lyotard saw such playful mixing as marking the end of specific genres. As Western culture has run into the sand, he said, all that is left to do is 'play with the pieces'.

Baudrillard and hyperreality

One of the most influential contemporary media theorists is the French postmodernist thinker Jean Baudrillard (1929–2007), whose work was strongly influenced by the ideas of Marshall McLuhan. Baudrillard regarded the impact of modern mass media as being quite different from, and much more profound than, that of any previous media technology. The coming of the mass media, particularly electronic media such as television, has transformed the very nature of our lives. TV does not just 'represent' the world to us; it increasingly



Was the 2003 invasion of Iraq a hyperreal event? How?

defines what the world in which we live actually is.

Baudrillard's postmodern ideas can be hard to grasp, but a relatively simple way of doing so is as follows. There was a time – not so long ago – when it was possible to separate reality, or the real world of events, from media representations of that world. So, for instance, in the real world there may be a war with real and terrible consequences for the combatants and civilians caught up in it. The media report on this war and inform us of what is happening – how many casualties there are, who is winning, and so on. These two aspects – the reality and the representations – were seen as quite separate things.

But Baudrillard's (1983) theory is that the border between reality and representation has collapsed; we can no longer separate the representations from the reality. Why not? After all, there are still wars and there are still

reporters sending back images and reports on them. Baudrillard argues that media representations are, in fact, *part of* the hyperreal world and cannot be seen as separate from it. As the vast majority of people only ever 'know' about foreign wars via media representations of them, their reality is shaped, determined even, by the media. **Hyperreality** is a world in which the ultimate guarantor of authenticity and reality is precisely that it has been on TV or other media – to be 'more real than the real'. This may be part of an explanation for the growth of celebrity culture, where the only acceptable sign of success and significance is to appear on TV or in glossy magazines.

Just before the outbreak of hostilities in the first Gulf War in 1991, Baudrillard wrote a newspaper article entitled 'The Gulf War cannot happen'. When war was declared and a bloody conflict took place, it might seem obvious that Baudrillard got it wrong. Not a bit of

it. After the war, Baudrillard (2004 [1991]) then wrote *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*. What did he mean? He meant that the war was not like other wars that have happened in history. It was a war of the media age, a televisual spectacle, in which, along with other viewers throughout the world, US President George Bush Senior and the president of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, watched the coverage on CNN to see what was actually ‘happening’.

Baudrillard argues that, in an age where the mass media are everywhere, in effect a new reality – hyperreality – is created, composed of the intermingling of people’s behaviour and media images. The world of hyperreality is constructed of simulacra – images which only get their meaning from other images and hence have no grounding in an ‘external reality’. A long series of advertisements for the car insurance comparison website Compare-themarket.com, for example, barely refers to insurance at all, but alludes to previous ads in the series, which builds characters and funny storylines concerning an anthropomorphized family of meerkats. No political leader today can hope to win an election if he or she does not appear constantly on television: the TV image of the leader is the ‘person’ most viewers know, a hyperreal person that is ‘more real than the real’.

Baudrillard’s theory is seductive in an age of the global mass media and certainly has to be taken seriously. However, it can be objected that, once again, it treats the mass of people as passive recipients of media messages rather than being able to engage with and even resist them. Many media-savvy social movement organizations, such as Greenpeace, do try to compete with the mass media to create an alternative (hyper)reality which will motivate the uncommitted to environmental activism. It also remains the case that many real-world conflicts and famines fail to attract sufficient Western media interest and therefore fall outside Baudrillard’s hyperreality. There is still a real world beyond the media-saturated hyperreality of postmodern theory.

To varying degrees, all of the theories discussed above failed to appreciate the active

part played by audiences in the reception of media content and forms. Because they look to theorize ‘the media’, there has been a persistent tendency to downplay or ignore the diverse ways in which audiences make sense of and use different media products. However, scholars working in the field of audience research have changed this situation somewhat, and we look at some key ideas from this body of work in the next section.

THINKING CRITICALLY

List as many examples of ‘hyperreality’ as you can think of. Explain in your own words exactly what makes each one ‘hyperreal’. Why should it matter that we can only understand the world through the lens of the mass media?

Audiences and media representations

The effect that ideological bias has on the audience depends upon the theoretical stance one takes over the position of the audience for mass media. Here, we turn to the question through a relatively brief introduction to audience studies and media representations of social groups.

Audience studies

One of the earliest, and the most straightforward, models of audience response is the *hypodermic model*. This compares the media message to a drug injected by syringe. The model is based on the assumption that the audience passively and directly accepts the message and does not critically engage with it, and it assumes that the message is received and interpreted in more or less the same way by all members of society. On this view, the media is seen as ‘drugging’ the audience, destroying its ability to think critically about the wider world (Marcuse 1964). The hypodermic model is now seen as rather naïve and was often little more than an unstated conjecture



The hypodermic model assumes that media messages are passively received by viewers. Such ideas are often implicit in arguments about the effects of television on children.

in early studies. However, its assumptions can still be found in some contemporary writers who are sceptical about the effects of the mass media on modern society.

Critics of the hypodermic model pointed out that it takes no account of the very different responses that audiences have to the media. Most theorists now argue that audience responses go through various stages. In their work on this question, Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) drew on studies of political broadcasts during US presidential elections, arguing that audience response is formed through a two-step flow: the first step is when the message reaches the audience; the second comes when the audience interprets the message through their social interaction with influential people – ‘opinion leaders’ – who further shape the response.

Later theories assume a more active role for the audience. The *gratification model* looks at

the ways in which different audiences use the media to meet their own needs (Lull 1990). Audiences may use the media to learn more about the world, finding out about the weather or stock markets, for example. Others may use the media to help with their relationships, to feel part of a fictional community (by watching TV soaps), or to get on with friends and colleagues who watch the same programmes. Critics argued that this model assumes that the needs of the audience already exist, not that they are created by the media.

Later theories of audience responses have looked at the ways in which people actively interpret the media. Stuart Hall’s *reception theory* (1980) focuses on the way in which the class and cultural background of the members of an audience affect the way in which they make sense of different media ‘texts’ – a term that encompasses various forms of media, from books to films and music. Some

individuals may simply accept the 'preferred reading' that is encoded in a text – such as a news bulletin – by its producer. This preferred reading is likely to reflect the dominant or mainstream ideology (as the Glasgow University Media Group found).

However, Hall argues that the understanding of a text also depends on the cultural and class background of the person interpreting it. Other members of an audience may take an 'oppositional' reading of a text, because their social position places them in conflict with the preferred reading. For example, a worker involved in strike action or a member of an ethnic minority is likely to make an oppositional reading of a news story on industrial or race relations, rather than accept the dominant one.

Recent theories have focused on the way in which audiences filter information through their own experience. The audience may link different media 'texts' (programmes or genres, for example) or use one type of media to engage with another – questioning what they are told on television compared to newspapers (Fiske 1989). Here the audience has a powerful role, far removed from the hypodermic model. This *interpretative model* views audience response as shaping the media through its engagement or rejection of its output.

What we can see in this brief sketch is the movement away from an overly simplistic understanding of the relationship between media output and the audience, towards increasingly more sophisticated models that place greater emphasis on the active audience. We can also see a shift away from one-way models (from media to audience) in favour of two-way models that allow room for audiences to shape media output rather than simply being passive sponges soaking up whatever comes their way.

Representing class, gender, ethnicity and disability

An issue that has received much attention in media studies is the problem of media representations, particularly in television

fiction. Which social groups should the mass media represent and which groups are absent from our TV screens? We look briefly at the way in which representations of social class, gender, ethnicity and disabled people serve to reinforce stereotypes, though there is some evidence that this may now be changing in some cases.

Representations of the working class on UK television appear to be ubiquitous (Kendall 2005) – from soap operas such as the long-running *Coronation Street* (1960 to the present) and *EastEnders* (1985 to the present) to films exploring working-class life such as *My Name is Joe* (1998), *Billy Elliott* (2000) or *Vera Drake* (2004) and comedy/drama series such as *Clocking Off* (2000–3) and *The Street* (2006). There seems to be no shortage of representations of working-class lives on TV and film. Nonetheless, some have argued that the majority of these representations reflect a middle-class version of what working-class life is like. This is mainly because the production of TV and film is dominated by middle-class professionals and consequently presents a distorted view. The working class tend to be shown in northern industrial cities and environments; people work with their hands in manual jobs (or are unemployed) and are seldom shown as making a living in other ways. The environments in which they live are usually presented as hard and unforgiving, but, paradoxically, also as strong communities exhibiting social solidarity. This stereotypical presentation has been remarkably enduring and persists into the twenty-first century.

Research studies have repeatedly demonstrated that representations of girls and women in the mass media overwhelmingly involve traditional stereotypes of gender roles. Women are seen in domestic roles as housewives and homemakers, as objects of male sexual desire or in working situations that extend the domestic role – such as nurses, carers or office workers. Generally, such representations have been fairly consistent across news reports, drama and entertainment programming, leading Gaye Tuchman (1978) to refer to 'the symbolic annihilation of

women' on television. For example, between 1973 and 1993, of all characters on American prime-time television, 68.5 per cent were male. The proportion went down from 72 per cent in 1973 to 65 per cent by 1993 (Gerbner 1997).

However, more recent research has concluded that things are changing, albeit slowly, with an increasing variety of portrayals, including that of the strong, independent woman (Glascok 2001; Meyers 1999). New female heroines in programmes such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *La Femme Nikita* and *Lara Croft*, alongside strong female characters such as high-powered lawyers (*Silk*, 2010), police chiefs (*The Killing*, 2011) and other professions in TV drama, all attest to some changing representations of women.

See chapter 15, 'Gender and Sexuality', for a detailed discussion of gender issues.

Things are not quite so simple, though. Many of these strong female characters still conform to other longstanding feminine norms. *Buffy* and *Lara Croft* are young, slim and conventionally attractive women who appeal to the mainstream 'male gaze'. And many of the older, successful professional women tend to have disastrous or empty personal lives, which illustrates Susan Faludi's (1991) argument of a subtle backlash (both in reality and fiction) against women who break conventional gender roles – it will all end in tears eventually!

Media representations of ethnic minorities and disabled people have been seen as reinforcing rather than challenging stereotypes. Black and Asian people were noticeably absent from mainstream television until quite recently, and even when they were present, for example in news reports and documentaries, this tended to be as problematic social groups. For instance, media coverage of the 1970s moral panic around 'mugging' (Hall et al. 1978) and the inner-city riots of the 1980s and early twenty-first century was extensive.

Jack Shaheen's *The TV Arab* (1984) and *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (2001) examined the portrayal of Arabs on television and in Hollywood films (mostly American made) respectively. The 1984 study looked at more than 100 television shows between 1975 and 1984 featuring Arab characters. According to Shaheen, TV depictions depend on four myths: '[Arabs] are all fabulously wealthy; they are barbaric and uncultured; they are sex maniacs with a penchant for white slavery; they revel in acts of terrorism' (1984: 179). They are usually dressed strangely, reinforcing the view that Arabs do not look or act like Americans. Such portrayals were just as easy to find in children's cartoons and many educational programmes, though some more recent documentaries had attempted to provide more accurate accounts.

In the overwhelming majority of Hollywood film characterizations, Shaheen found that Arab characters were the 'bad guys'. In fact, out of around 1,000 films, just twelve involved positive depictions, fifty-two were quite balanced, and the other 900+ portrayed Arabs in this negative way. This was the case irrespective of whether the film was a blockbuster or a low-budget feature and whether the character was central to the plot or played a minor part. Shaheen shows that Arab stereotypes have existed in film since 1896 and generally depict Arab people as 'brutal, heartless, uncivilized religious fanatics and money-mad cultural "others" bent on terrorizing civilized Westerners, especially Christians and Jews'. He argues that such stereotypes are useful for writers and filmmakers as they make their jobs that much easier. Shaheen suggests this situation will only change when the Arab-American community is powerful enough to exert an influence on the film industry in the same way that women and African Americans have done in the past.

Ethnic minorities have also been commonly presented as different from an indigenous, white British culture and, often, as presenting problems for it (Solomos and Back 1996). Recent attempts to produce more representative imagery, for instance, in soaps such as

18.3 Real life and soap operas

A genre of continuing drama created by radio and television came to be called 'soap opera' – now TV's most popular type of programme. Of the most watched TV shows in Britain each week, almost all are soaps – *EastEnders*, *Coronation Street*, *Emmerdale* and several others. Soap operas fall into various different types, or sub-genres, at least on British TV. Soaps produced in the UK tend to be gritty and down to earth, often concerned with the lives of poorer people. Second, there are American imports, many of which, such as *Gossip Girl*, portray more glamorous lives. A third category is made up of Australian imports, such as *Neighbours*. These tend to be low-budget productions, featuring middle-class homes and lifestyles.

Soaps are like TV as a whole: continuous. Individual stories may come to an end and different characters appear and disappear, but the soap itself has no ending until it is taken off the air completely. Tension is created between episodes by so-called cliff-hangers. The episode stops abruptly just before some key event happens and the viewer has to wait until the next episode to see how things turn out.

A basic part of the genre of soap opera is that it demands regular viewing on the part of whoever watches it. A single episode makes very little sense. Soap operas presume a history, which the regular viewer knows – he or she becomes familiar with the characters, with their personalities and their life experiences. The threads, which are linked to create such a history, are above all personal and emotional – soaps for the most part do not look at larger social or economic frameworks, which impinge only from the outside.

Sociologists have put different views forward as to why soap operas are so popular – and they are popular across the world, not only in Britain or America, but also in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Some think that they provide a means of escape, particularly where women (who watch soaps in greater numbers than men) find their own lives dull or oppressive. Such a view is not particularly convincing, though, given that many soaps feature people whose lives are just as problematic.

More plausible is the idea that soap operas address universal properties of personal and emotional life. They explore dilemmas anyone may face, and perhaps they even help some viewers to think more creatively about their own lives. In her book *Soap Opera* (2002), the sociologist Dorothy Hobson argues that soaps work not because they are escapist, but 'because the audience has intimate familiarity with the characters and their lives. Through its characters the soap opera must connect with the experience of its audience, and its content must be stories of the ordinary.'

THINKING CRITICALLY

Do you watch soap operas? If so, which ones? Why do you find them attractive?

If you do not, what do you think other people, who do watch, actually get out of the experience? How might soap operas be analysed by neo-Marxist critical theorists as being part of the 'culture industry', and is that type of explanation convincing? What criticisms could be levelled at it?

EastEnders, may offer a way forward. The serial drama provides a format which allows a variety of ethnic groups to be shown as ordinary members of society, with similar lives and personal troubles to everyone else. Perhaps it is through such mundane representations that stereotypes can be avoided?

If ethnic minorities have been defined as

culturally different, then the representations of disabled people in the media have routinely been as *physically* or *bodily* different, based on the 'personal tragedy' model of disability (Oliver 1990; also see chapter 11). News stories involving disabled people are much more likely to get an airing if the story can be fitted into this dominant framing and, typically, this means

showing disabled people as dependent, rather than as living independent lives (Karpf 1988).

Disabled people have been all but invisible in TV drama and entertainment and, when they are included, are over-represented among criminals and mentally unstable characters or among 'the bad, mad and sad'. This situation has a very long history. Think of the evil Captain Hook in *Peter Pan*, the tragic Quasimodo in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* or John Merrick in *The Elephant Man*. Disabled characters are never incidental to a storyline, but are included precisely because of their disability. In a content analysis of six weeks of UK television, Cumberbatch and Negrine (1992) found just 0.5 per cent of fictional characters were disabled people and almost all of these were wheelchair users – not an accurate representation of disabled people in the UK, the overwhelming majority of whom are not wheelchair users.

A 1992 report by the sociologist and disability activist Colin Barnes on media representations of disabled people found some positive changes, particularly in American drama series, which tried to present disabled people as 'normal', playing down the characters' disabilities. However, Barnes (1991: 19) sees that simply ignoring disability is not the answer. Instead, he maintains:

The only solution with any hope of success is for all media organisations to provide the kind of information and imagery which, firstly, acknowledges and explores the complexity of the experience of disability and a disabled identity and, secondly, facilitates the meaningful integration of all disabled people into the mainstream economic and social life of the community.

Media representations are not the *cause* of discrimination or the exclusion of disabled people from mainstream society. Nevertheless, stereotypical representations can *reinforce* existing negative ideas of social groups and, in doing so, can be seen as part of the wider social problem. Despite some signs of a growing awareness of the issue and some positive change in recent years, the exam-

ples above show that it will be some time yet before media representations make any significant contribution to challenging social stereotypes.

Controlling the global media

Sociological theories of the various forms of media show us that they can never be assumed to be politically neutral or socially beneficial. For many people, a key problem is the increasing concentration of ownership of different types of media within large conglomerates that have come to be known as 'supercompanies'. If politicians were alarmed at the ownership of a single national newspaper by one of the big press barons, then how much more serious is ownership of transnational media companies? As we have seen throughout this book, the Internet is one of the main contributors to – and manifestations of – current processes of globalization. Yet globalization is transforming the international reach and impact of other forms of media as well.

Although the media have always had international dimensions – such as the gathering of news stories and the distribution of films overseas – until the 1970s most media companies operated within specific domestic markets in accordance with regulations from national governments. The media industry was also differentiated into distinct sectors – for the most part, cinema, print media, radio and television broadcasting all operated independently of one another.

In the past forty years, profound transformations have taken place within the media industry. National markets have given way to a fluid global market, while new technologies have led to the fusion of forms of media that were once distinct. By the start of the twenty-first century, the global media market was dominated by a group of about twenty multinational corporations whose role in the production, distribution and marketing of news and entertainment could be felt in almost every country in the world.

In their work on globalization, David Held and his colleagues (1999) point to five major shifts that have contributed to bringing about the global media order.

- 1 *Increasing concentration of ownership* The global media is now dominated by a small number of powerful, centralized media conglomerates.
- 2 *A shift from public to private ownership* Traditionally, media and telecommunications companies in almost all countries were partially or fully owned by the state. But liberalization of the business environment and the relaxing of regulations have led to the privatization and commercialization of media companies.
- 3 *Transnational corporate structures* Media companies no longer operate strictly within national boundaries. Likewise, media ownership rules have been loosened to allow cross-border investment and acquisition.
- 4 *Diversification over a variety of media products* The media industry has diversified and is much less segmented than in previous times. Enormous media conglomerates produce and distribute a mix of media content, including music, news, print media and television programming.
- 5 *A growing number of corporate media mergers* There has been a distinctive trend towards alliances between companies in different segments of the media industry. Telecommunications firms, computer hardware and software manufacturers, and media 'content' producers are increasingly involved in corporate mergers.

The globalization of the media has thrust 'horizontal' forms of communications to centre stage. If traditional media forms ensured that communication occurred within the boundaries of nation-states in a 'vertical' fashion, globalization is leading to the horizontal integration of communications. Communications and media can now more readily extend beyond the confines of individual countries (Sreberny-Mohammadi et al. 1997). Yet the new information order has

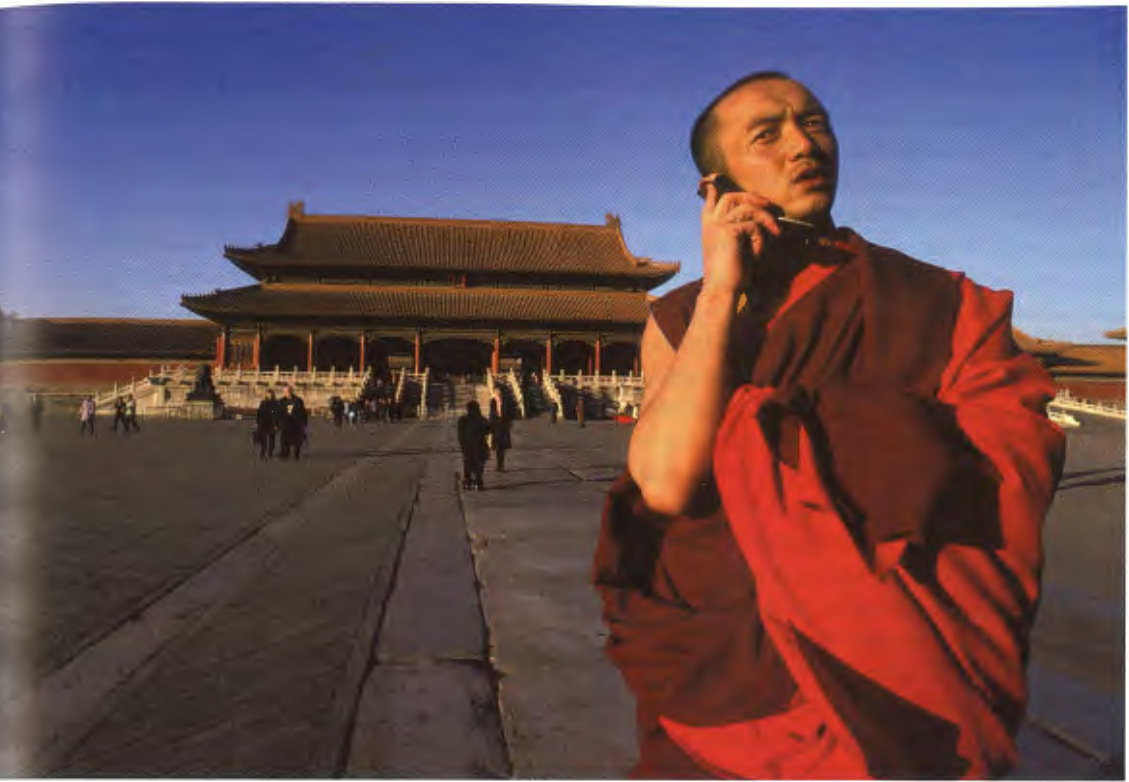
developed unevenly and reflects divisions between the developed and developing societies. Some scholars suggest that the new order would be better described as 'media imperialism'.

Media imperialism?

The paramount position of the industrialized countries, above all the United States, in the production and diffusion of media has led many observers to speak of **media imperialism** (Herman and McChesney 2003). According to this view, a cultural empire has been established. Less developed countries are held to be especially vulnerable, because they lack the resources to maintain their own cultural independence.

However, others argue that American media domination is not as simple as the above sketch suggests. What *exactly* is media imperialism? Does it exist when people from other cultures watch, and perhaps come to accept as superior, Western cultural products – the content of TV programmes, film and music, for example – that are imbued with Western cultural values? Or does media imperialism lie in the export of particular technologies such as television and mobile phones, which disrupt local cultures and transform them? Or does it exist when one country or region's media industries become so powerful they take over or force out of existence the local media outlets? And can we even speak of domination at all when people across the world have chosen to purchase TV sets and mobile phones and actually claim to find uses and pleasures in them (Tomlinson 1991)?

The headquarters of the world's twenty largest media conglomerates are all located in industrialized nations; the majority of them are in the United States. Media empires such as Time Warner, Disney/ABC and Viacom are all US-based. Among other large media corporations – apart from the Murdoch empire profiled in 'Global society 18.1' (p. 810) – are Sony BMG (one of the 'big 4' music companies), a joint venture between Sony Music Group and Bertelsmann Music Group, which owns numerous record labels including



The dramatic increase in mobile phone coverage around the world is one way in which globalization continues to compress time and space.

Arista and Columbia Records and distributes many independent labels; and Mondadori, a publishing house controlled by the television corporation owned by Silvio Berlusconi, the former Italian prime minister.

Through the electronic media, Western cultural products have certainly become widely diffused round the globe. As we have seen, American films are ubiquitous, as is Western popular music. In 2005 a new Disney theme park was opened in Hong Kong which replicates largely American attractions, rather than reflecting local culture. For example, the 'themed lands' in Hong Kong are Main Street (USA), Adventureland, Fantasyland and Tomorrowland, with all the usual characters, including Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Winnie the Pooh and Buzz Lightyear.

It is not only the more popular entertainment forms that are at issue, however. Control

of the world's news by the major Western agencies, it has been suggested, means the predominance of a 'First World outlook' in the information conveyed. Thus it has been claimed that attention is given to the developing world in news broadcasts mainly in times of disaster, crisis or military confrontation, and that the daily files of other types of news kept on the industrialized world are not maintained for developing world coverage.

Nonetheless, there are also some counter-trends which may support a more pluralistic theory of the media at a global level. One such is that of 'reverse flows', where media products in, for example, former colonial countries become popular and can be sold to previous colonizers. Reverse flows suggest that media imperialism is not absolute or unchallengeable. An example of a reverse flow is the success of the Hindi language Bollywood, based in

Mumbai. Bollywood films are becoming more popular in the UK (the former colonial power), the USA and Russia, and come second only to Hollywood films in Australia.

A second criticism is that the thesis of media imperialism rests implicitly on the 'hypodermic needle' model (discussed earlier), which assumes that Western cultural products carry with them Western values that are 'injected' into passive consumers around the globe. However, the growth of audience studies has alerted us to the fact that consumers are active, not passive, watchers and listeners, and may reject, modify or reinterpret the messages in media products. For example, Liebes and Katz (1993) studied a range of subcultural audiences in Israel and their responses to the American series *Dallas*. Russians in Israel saw the programme as embodying a form of capitalist manipulation that children should not be allowed to watch. For Israeli Arabs, the sexual themes in *Dallas* were potentially embarrassing and, as a result, the show ought not to be watched in mixed-sex groups. They also saw a domineering villain such as J. R. Ewing as reflecting similar figures within the Israeli establishment.

In a similar vein, Roland Robertson (1995) has argued that a better concept for understanding global processes is *glocalization* (the mixture of globalizing and localizing forces) rather than globalization (see chapter 4 for discussion). This is because American corporations have to take cognizance of local cultures if they are to market their products successfully in other countries. They certainly cannot ignore them. In this process, the products are often significantly altered. The thesis of glocalization suggests that the simple one-way flow process suggested by media imperialism is likely to be the exception rather than the rule.

The titles of two studies by Jeremy Tunstall, thirty years apart, tell a similar story. In *The Media Are American* (1977), he argued that the industrialization of mass media in America enabled it to dominate global media production. But, in *The Media Were American* (2007), his thesis is that the USA has lost its global

dominance. The rise of India and China as media producers and consumers, along with stronger national cultures and media systems, has transformed and weakened the position of America in relation to the rest of the world. Even so, according to Hackett and Zhao, the logic of capital accumulation continues to spread across the world: 'In the global media system, it is as if anything can be said, in any language, at any location, as long as it can be said profitably' (2005: 22). In that sense, it is capitalistic values rather than American national values that characterize the exchange of media products.

THINKING CRITICALLY

Is 'media imperialism' an accurate description of the global influence of Western media and culture? Are there any examples of media and cultural products moving the other way, to exert an influence on the development of Western culture? How does media imperialism fit with Lyotard's postmodern thesis of the collapse of Western culture? Which view is best supported by the evidence?

Ownership of media 'supercompanies'

In January 2000, two of the most influential media companies joined together in what was the largest corporate merger the world had ever seen. In a deal worth \$337 billion, the world's biggest media company, Time Warner, and the world's largest Internet service provider, America Online (AOL), announced their intention to create the 'world's first fully integrated media and communications company for the Internet Century'. Yet, even more than for its size, the deal attracted great attention as the first major union between 'old media' and 'new media'.

The origins of Time Warner date back to 1923 when Henry Luce founded *Time* magazine. The overwhelming success of *Time* was

followed by the creation of the business magazine *Fortune* in 1930 and the photographic magazine *Life* in 1936. Over the twentieth century, Time Inc. grew into a media corporation embracing TV and radio stations, the music industry, the vast Warner Brothers movie and cartoon empire, and the world's first 24-hour news channel, CNN.

The rise of America Online is typical of the 'new media' of the information age. Founded in 1982, AOL initially offered dial-up Internet access charged at an hourly rate. By 1994, it had 1 million subscribers. After introducing unlimited Internet use for a standard monthly fee in 1996, its membership soared to 4.5 million. As the number of users continued to grow – 8 million people were using AOL by 1997 – the company embarked on a series of mergers, acquisitions and alliances, which consolidated its position as the pre-eminent Internet service provider.

The merger between the two companies was set to create a US\$350 billion media supercompany, AOL-Time Warner, bringing 24 million AOL subscribers, 120 million magazine readers and the television channels CNN, HBO and Warner Brothers all under one corporate roof. Yet the merger failed. AOL was never able to meet its ambitious subscriber or revenue targets and the technological spin-offs from combining film and Internet technologies were slow to materialize. In 2002, the company posted a loss of almost \$100 billion, resulting in the company dropping 'AOL' from its name in 2003. Plans to sell off AOL were mooted in 2007, and it was sold on 9 December 2009. The companies that did succeed were not those looking to merge the old and the new, but, others, such as Google, which had a clear focus on the World Wide Web and its huge global potential.

Not everyone agrees that the idea of media supercompanies is one that should be aspired to. Where enthusiasts see a dream, critics sense a nightmare. As media corporations become ever more concentrated, centralized and global in their reach, there is reason to be concerned that the important role of the media as a forum for free speech, expression and

debate will be curtailed. A single company that controls both the content – TV programmes, music, films, news sources – and the means of distribution is in a position of great power. It can promote its own material (the singers and celebrities it has made famous), it can exercise self-censorship (omitting news stories that might cast its holdings or corporate supporters in a negative light) and it can 'cross-endorse' products within its own empire at the expense of those outside it. The vision of the Internet in the hands of several media conglomerates stands in stark contrast to the idea of a free and unrestricted electronic realm held out by Internet enthusiasts just a few years ago.

But it is important to remember that there are few inevitabilities in the social world. Attempts at total control of information sources and distribution channels rarely succeed, either because of anti-trust legislation aimed at preventing monopolies or through the persistent and creative responses of media users who seek out alternative information routes. Media consumers are not 'cultural dopes' who can be manipulated effortlessly by corporate interests; as the scope and volume of media forms and content expand, individuals are becoming more, not less, skilled in interpreting and evaluating the messages and material they encounter.

Anti-monopoly measures

As the Glasgow University Media Group pointed out, those who construct the news act as 'gatekeepers' for what gets onto the agenda. News stories that are successfully broadcast or published are not always chosen according to some simple criterion of newsworthiness. Journalists are well aware that they must find stories that fit with the agenda of the organization for which they work, and these news organizations may have political agendas of their own – they are in the business not just of selling goods but of influencing opinions. For this reason, the rise and influence of the media entrepreneurs and the large media companies worries many. The proprietors of such corporations, such as Rupert Murdoch, make no

Global Society 18.1 Media empires – news corporation

Rupert Murdoch is an Australian-born entrepreneur who is the head of one of the world's largest media empires. News Corporation holds nine different media operating on six continents. By 2001 its turnover was £16.5 billion and it employed 34,000 staff (BBC 2001). In October 2004, ABC News reported the annual turnover as £29 billion.

Murdoch established News Corporation in Australia before moving into the British and American markets in the 1960s. His initial purchases of the UK *News of the World* and *The Sun* in 1969 and the US *New York Post* in the mid-1970s paved the way for a dramatic expansion in later acquisitions. Murdoch turned many of his newspapers towards sensationalistic journalism, building on the three themes of sex, crime and sport. *The Sun*, for example, became highly successful, with the highest circulation of any daily English-language newspaper in the world.

In the 1980s Murdoch started to expand into television, establishing Sky TV, a satellite and cable chain that proved commercially successful. He also owns 64 per cent of the Star TV network based in Hong Kong. Its declared strategy is to 'control the skies' in satellite transmission over an area from Japan to Turkey, taking in the gigantic markets of India and China. It transmits five channels, one of which is BBC World News. In 1985, Murdoch bought a half interest in 20th Century Fox films. His Fox Broadcasting Company started up in 1987 and became the fourth major television network in the United States.

In recent years, Murdoch invested heavily in the profitable digital satellite television industry, particularly through his ownership of Sky and coverage of live sporting events such as basketball and live premiership football. According to Murdoch, sports coverage is News Corporation's 'battering ram' for entering new media markets (Herman and McChesney 1997). Because sporting events are best viewed live, they lend themselves to the 'pay-per-view' format that is profitable both for Murdoch and for advertisers.

On 13 July 2011, Murdoch's News Corporation bid of £8 billion to take full control

of BSkyB was abandoned in the wake of police and parliamentary inquiries into illegal mobile phone hacking by journalists and private investigators hired by the *News of the World*. The scandal had led to the closure of the paper three days earlier after 168 years in print. However, James Murdoch suggested that the *News of the World* constituted less than 1 per cent of News Corp business – a reflection of the declining readership, profitability and influence of newspapers in the digital era. On 19 July, both Rupert and James Murdoch appeared at a live, televised session of the House of Commons, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, answering questions on phone hacking. A judicial inquiry into the scandal was ordered by the prime minister, and the affair has been widely seen as the biggest setback the expanding Murdoch empire has ever had.

Governments can cause trouble for Murdoch because, at least within their own boundaries, they can introduce legislation limiting media cross-ownership – that is, a situation where the same firm owns several newspapers and TV stations. The European Union has also expressed concern about the dominant position of very large media companies. Yet Murdoch's power is not easily contained, given its global spread. He is weighty enough to influence governments, but it is in the nature of the telecommunications business that it is everywhere and nowhere. Murdoch's power base is very large, but also elusive.

Murdoch was, for a while, head of the largest media organization the world has known. In 1995, however, he was overtaken when the Disney Company and ABC merged. Disney's chairman at the time, Michael Eisner, made it clear that he wanted to compete with Murdoch in the rapidly expanding markets of Asia. Murdoch's response to the merger was: 'They are twice as big as me now.' Then he added: 'A bigger target.' The chief executives of Disney, Time Warner and Viacom have all noted that Murdoch is the media executive they respect and fear the most – and whose moves they study most carefully (Herman and McChesney 1997).

Global Society 18.2 Censoring the Internet in China

The contradictory nature of globalization is illustrated clearly in China, a country that is undergoing rapid cultural and economic transformation under the Chinese Communist Party.

In the 1980s, the Chinese government oversaw the expansion of a national television system and encouraged the purchase of televisions by its citizens. It saw television broadcasting as a means of uniting the country and promoting party authority. Television, however, can be a volatile medium. Not only is it not possible for television broadcasting to be tightly controlled in an age of satellite-based channels, but Chinese audiences have demonstrated their willingness to interpret TV content in ways that run contrary to government intentions (Lull 1997).

In interviews with 100 Chinese families, James Lull found that audiences, like other populations under communist regimes, were 'masters of interpretation, reading between the lines in order to pick up the less obvious messages'. In his interviews, Lull noted that his respondents would describe not only what they watched, but how they watched it: 'Because viewers know that the government often bends and exaggerates its reports, they become skilled at imagining the true situation. What is presented, what is left out, what is given priority, how things are said – all these modes are noticed and interpreted sensitively.' Lull concluded that many of the messages seen by Chinese audiences on TV – primarily in imported films and commercials – run contrary to the way of life and opportunities available in their own society. Seeing television content emphasizing individuality and the consumer society, many viewers felt their own options were constrained in real life. Television conveyed to Chinese audiences that other social systems seemed to function more smoothly and offer greater freedom than their own.

More recently, the Internet and other new communication technologies have posed fresh challenges for the Chinese government. While some people contend that these new media will help people to circumvent state controls, others maintain that the state censors are likely to keep

pace with technological advances. In 2006, the leading Internet company Google announced that, in order to gain access to China's vast market, it would censor search results to satisfy the Chinese authorities. Reporters using the new site reported that the BBC website was inaccessible, and critics warn that sensitive subjects, such as the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre and sites promoting independence for Taiwan, will be restricted. Google's cooperation with the Chinese authorities supports those arguments, suggesting that profit-making rather than spreading American values drives US media companies. Internet censorship in China is discussed in more detail in the following article.

The great firewall of China

The Chinese effort to censor the internet is a feat of technology, legislation and manpower. According to the BBC, which is almost completely blocked within the 'great firewall of China' (as it is known among techies), 50,000 different Chinese authorities 'do nothing but monitor traffic on the Internet'. No single law exists to permit this mass invasion of privacy and proscription of free speech. Rather, hundreds of articles in dozens of pieces of legislation work to obfuscate the mandate of the government to maintain political order through censorship.

According to *Internet Filtering in China in 2004–2005: A Country Study*, the most rigorous survey of Chinese internet filtering to date, China's censorship regime extends from the fatpipe backbone [the Internet or computer network] to the street cyber-café. Chinese communications infrastructure allows packets of data to be filtered at 'choke points' designed into the network, while on the street liability for prohibited content is extended onto multiple parties – author, host, reader – to chilling effect. All this takes place under the watchful eye of machine and human censors, the latter often volunteers.

The ramifications of this system, as the Open Net Initiative's John Parley stressed when he delivered a report to the US–China Economic and Security Review Commission in April,

'should be of concern to anyone who believes in participatory democracy'. The ONI found that 60 per cent of sites relating to opposition political parties were blocked, as were 90 per cent of sites detailing the Nine Commentaries, a series of columns about the Chinese Communist Party published by the Hong Kong-based *Epoch Times* and associated by some with the banned spiritual movement Falun Gong.

The censorship does not end at the World Wide Web. New internet-based technologies, which looked to lend hope to free speech when ONI filed its last report on China in 2002, are also being targeted. Although email censorship is not as rampant as many (including the Chinese themselves) believe, blogs, discussion forums and bulletin boards have all been targeted through various measures of state control.

What, then, of China's 94 million web-surfers? One discussion thread at Slashdot, the well-respected and popular discussion forum for techno-libertarians, is telling. When a well-meaning westerner offered a list of links prefaced with 'assuming that you can read Slashdot, here are a few web pages that your government would probably prefer you not to read', one poster, Hung Wei Lo responded: 'I have travelled to China many times and work with many H1-B's [temporary workers from outside US] from all parts of China. All of them are already quite knowledgeable about all the information provided in the links above, and most do not hesitate to engage in discussions about such topics over lunch. The fact that you feel all 1.6 billion Chinese are most certainly blind to these pieces of information is a direct result of years of indoctrination of western (I'm assuming American) propaganda.'

Indeed, anti-Japanese protests [in 2005] have been cited by some as an example of how the Chinese people circumvent their state's diligent censorship regime using networked technologies such as mobile text messages (SMS), instant messaging, emails, bulletin boards and blogs to communicate and organize. The argument here of course is that the authorities were ambivalent towards these protests – one blogger reports that the state sent its own SMS during the disturbances: 'We ask the people to express your patriotic passion through the right channel, following the law and maintaining order.'

China will have to keep up with the slew of emerging technologies making untapped networked communication more sophisticated by the day. . . . Judging by the past record, it cannot be assumed that the state censorship machinery will not be able to meet these future challenges.

Source: Hogge (2005). This article was originally published on the independent online magazine www/opendemocracy.net/. Reprinted by permission of openDemocracy

THINKING CRITICALLY

How independent and reliable do you think this article is? Track down the source and make sure you understand the mission statement of 'openDemocracy'. What comparative evidence from other countries could you point to which might make the assessment of China's censorship practices provided here seem less extraordinary?

secret of their political views, which inevitably are a cause of concern to political parties and other groups holding different political positions.

Recognizing this, all countries have provisions that seek to control media ownership. But how tight should these be? And, given the global character of media enterprises, can

national governments in any case have much hope of controlling them?

The issue of media regulation is more complex than might appear at first sight. It seems obvious that it is in the public interest that there should be a diversity of media organizations, since this is likely to ensure that many different groups and political perspec-

tives can be listened to. Yet placing limits on who can own what, and what forms of media technology they can use, might affect the economic prosperity of the media sector. A country that is too restrictive might find itself left behind – the media industries are one of the fastest growing sectors of the modern economy.

One guiding thread of media regulation policy might be the recognition that market dominance by two or three large media companies simultaneously threatens both proper economic competition and democracy – since the media-owners are unelected. Existing anti-monopoly legislation can be brought into play here, although it differs widely across Europe and other industrial countries. Competitiveness means – or should mean – pluralism, and presumably pluralism is good for democracy. Yet is pluralism enough?

Many point to the USA, arguing that having a plurality of media channels does not guarantee the quality and accuracy of content. Some see the maintenance of a strong public broadcasting sector as of key importance in blocking the dominance of the large media companies. Yet public broadcasting systems create their own problems. In most countries they themselves used to be a monopoly, and in many countries they were effectively used as a means of government propaganda. The question of who is to regulate the regulators comes up here with particular force.

One issue that complicates the question of media regulation is the very rapid rate of technological change. The media are constantly being transformed by technical innovations, and forms of technology that were once distinct are now fusing together. If television programmes are watched via the Internet, for example, what type of media regulation applies? Among member states of the European Union, the question of media and telecommunications convergence is at the forefront of debate, but the role of the EU in media regulation remains weak, and its 2005 policy document the 'Audio-Visual Services Directive' has been seen as either unjustified,

because member states already have their own safeguards in place, or unworkable.

Resistance and alternatives to the global media

While the power and reach of the global media are undeniable, there are attempts to counter global media empires by using new technologies to facilitate alternative forms of news gathering. One of the more successful is the Independent Media Centre, or Indymedia, a global collective of independent media outlets associated with the anti-globalization movement. Since its creation in 1999, during a protest against the World Trade Organization in Seattle, Indymedia has sought to create open access online platforms, enabling political activists and citizens to upload their own videos, images and reports as well as live streaming of protest events. It is thought to have some 150 local centres across thirty countries.

Indymedia seeks to break down the barrier between media professionals and the public, encouraging people to participate in the production of news rather than simply being passive consumers of corporate and state broadcast news. Although the Internet is clearly central to the Indymedia project, local groups also produce publications – such as Indymedia UK's weekly news-sheet, *Schnews* – community radio stations, video, email lists, a wiki site and even TV stations in public access slots. However, the emergence and increasing popularity of individual blogs (which did not exist when Indymedia was created) has to some extent undermined its originality and functions (Ritzer 2011: 142–3). Anyone can now create and manage their own blog – the ultimate form of decentralization – and get their views and opinions published online.

Paradoxically, Indymedia has suffered from its democratic, open access approach, which allows many different individuals and groups to make use of the network, sometimes bringing heightened governmental surveillance and intervention. In 2004, its Internet provider took down two hard drives from its server at



In spite of suspicion, its being banned in some Middle East countries and American military attacks on its broadcast centres in Afghanistan and Iraq, Al Jazeera continues to expand and prosper in the digital age.

the request of the FBI, effectively closing down twenty websites in thirteen countries. The FBI had received a request from the Public Prosecutor's Office in Bologna, Italy, based on their claim that a violent Italian anarchist group involved in planting bombs and sending letter bombs to politicians had used Indymedia to claim responsibility for the attacks. It is unclear whether this was, in fact, the case. But it does highlight some of the problems with the loosely organized, networked model of Indymedia, which seems ill-equipped to resist the demands of states and security forces (Mueller 2011: 18–22).

Religion, tradition and popular outlooks can also be a brake on media globalization, while local regulations and domestic media institutions can play a role in limiting the impact of global media. The case of new

media in the Middle East is an interesting one. Ali Mohammadi (2002) investigated the response of Islamic countries to the forces of media globalization. According to Mohammadi, resistance to the incursion of outside media forms has ranged from muted criticism to the outright banning of Western satellites. The reaction to media globalization and the action taken by individual countries in large part reflect their overall responses towards the legacy of Western colonialism and the encroachment of modernity.

Until the mid-1980s, most television programming in the Islamic world was produced and distributed within national borders or through Arabsat – the pan-Arab satellite broadcasting network composed of twenty-one states. The liberalization of broadcasting and the power of global satellite TV

have transformed the contours of television in the Islamic world. The events of the 1991 Gulf War made the Middle East a centre of attention for the global media industry and significantly affected television broadcasting and consumption within the region as well. Satellites spread rapidly, with Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Dubai, Tunisia and Jordan all launching satellite channels by 1993. By the end of the decade, most Islamic states had established their own satellite channels, as well as accessing global media programmes.

Al Jazeera is the largest Arabic news channel in the Middle East, offering news coverage twenty-four hours a day. Founded in 1996, and based in Qatar, Al Jazeera is the fastest growing news network among Arab communities and Arabic-speaking people around the world. Some Western critics have argued that it is overly sensational and shows too much violent and emotionally charged footage from war zones, as well as giving disproportionate coverage to fundamentalist and extremist groups (Sharkey 2004). Its political programmes are most popular, but other shows covering culture, sport and health help to increase the channel's audience share. However, many, perhaps most, TV stations use sensational stories to capture audiences, and it may be objected that Al Jazeera is simply reflecting its audience in the same way that Western stations do.

Recent academic studies argue that Al Jazeera has played an influential role in breaking open state control of the Middle East media, encouraging open debate on important issues such as the invasion of Iraq, the situation in Palestine, and Arab identities (Lynch 2006; Zayani 2005; Miles 2005). The news channel has helped to change political and social debates, not only in the Middle East, but also in the West, where digital viewers can tune in for an alternative perspective on global events. (Al Jazeera now broadcasts from London and Washington, DC, as well as from Doha and Kuala Lumpur.)

In some Islamic states, the themes and material dealt with on Western television have created tensions. Programmes relating to

gender and human rights issues are particularly controversial; Saudi Arabia, for example, no longer supports BBC Arabic because of concerns over its coverage of human rights issues. Three Islamic states – Iran, Saudi Arabia and Malaysia – have banned satellite access to Western television. Iran has been the staunchest opponent of the Western media, branding it a source of 'cultural pollution' and a promoter of Western consumer values.

Such strong responses are in the minority, however. Mohammadi (2002) concluded that, although Islamic countries have responded to media globalization by attempting to resist or provide an alternative, most have found it necessary to accept certain modifications to their culture in order to maintain their own cultural identity. The 'traditionalist approach', such as that favoured by Iran and Saudi Arabia, is losing ground to responses based on adaptation and modernization.

Conclusion

Contemporary mass media are comprised of a complex variety of different forms, from print and newspapers, to radio, television and film, smartphones and interactive cyberspace. Understanding the social impact of the new digital media is an important task for sociologists. In particular, a new generation who have experienced socialization processes incorporating the new media may be better placed to appreciate just how embedded they are in the routines of everyday life. However, the task still requires that same struggle for sociological detachment and methodological rigour that characterizes the discipline's best research studies.

As individuals, we do not control technological change, and some critics perceive that the sheer pace of the contemporary changes threatens to lead either to a Big Brother-style surveillance state or, alternatively, social chaos. Yet both scenarios fail to take proper account of the way that people adapt to technological innovation and fit it into their everyday lives. Undoubtedly the Internet, wireless networks,

smartphones, and much more, do lead to changes in behaviour, but they do not entirely determine it. So far, at least, the overwhelmingly negative scenarios predicted by sceptics have signally failed to materialize.

Not only has the surveillance state not emerged, but, on the contrary, the Internet has facilitated much decentralization, new forms of social networking, and an opening up of opportunities for ordinary people to produce their own music, film, news, and much more, and to have them seen and heard by many more people. Conventional books and other 'pre-electronic' media also look unlikely to disappear. Bulky as it is, the book you are reading is actually handier to use than a digitized version and is much more flexible and portable, requiring no power source. Even the newer e-book readers, such as the Kindle, Nook and Cybook, require a power source and cannot be handled and manipulated like a conventional book.

On the other hand, it is becoming ever clearer that the new media are steadily canalizing or 'giving direction to' the older media

forms. Newspapers have moved online and are experimenting with subscriptions and payment methods to counter continuously falling sales. Music downloads directly from the Internet have fatally undermined sales of music CDs and, probably sometime in the future, DVD film sales too. Even the future of that most successful global medium, television, is not immune. The development and rapid take-up of on-demand television accessed via the Internet over the last decade shows that the days of national populations watching TV shows and events 'live' may already have ended.

It is often easier to appreciate revolutionary changes from a distance, long after their impact is known and, thus, proven. However, it is safe to say that those of us alive today are currently experiencing a digital revolution that is changing the media landscape forever. But that revolution is not just happening somewhere 'out there'. We are all part of it, and how we respond to and make use of the new technologies and media outlets will be just as important in determining their social impact.

Chapter review



- 1 Explain the difference between media and mass media. Provide some examples of mass media. What functions do the mass media collectively provide for society and for individuals?



- 2 What do you understand by the term 'the digital revolution'? What kinds of technologies and devices have emerged from the digital revolution?



- 3 Describe the pattern of Internet expansion around the globe. Which regions have seen the fastest take-up and which have lagged behind? Does it matter that some countries and regions have fewer people accessing the Internet and the World Wide Web than others?



- 4 Within countries, which social groups are likely to have lower levels of Internet access and use? Why do you think this is?



- 5 How have sociologists understood the rise of television? What positive and negative aspects of TV have been found? In what ways do digital television services differ from analogue services?

- 6 The Internet has raised copyright issues in the production and distribution of film and recorded music. What are the most serious of these and how have authorities tried to tackle them? It has also led to many benefits for audiences. What are these benefits?

- 7 A range of different theories of the media have been developed – functionalist, symbolic interactionist, conflict and postmodern perspectives. Briefly describe each and bring out the central differences across these perspectives.

- ? 8 The Frankfurt School saw modern mass media as part of the 'culture industry'. What is the latter and why is it seen as a negative development?
- ? 9 How does Thompson differentiate interactions in media types? What does he mean by 'mediated quasi-interaction'?
- ? 10 Compare the theories of Habermas (on the decline of the public sphere) and Baudrillard (on hyperreality). Which perspective do you think best fits the contemporary mix of media forms and their social consequences?
- 11 Audience research has made a significant contribution to our understanding of the way media messages are received. What do you think we have learned about media messages and their reception from this body of research?
- ? 12 The ownership of media is increasingly concentrated in the hands of large media conglomerates. What, if anything, is wrong with this concentration of ownership? Is 'media imperialism' a productive concept for future sociological research?

Research in practice

? As we have seen in this chapter, the most financially successful media products, such as films and television programmes, are made in Western societies, particularly the USA. However, their success often leads to 'cloning' in numerous other national contexts. One example is the export around the world of the UK comedy series *The Office*. But how does such cloning alter the central themes of the programmes and how much modification is required to make them 'fit' into the new cultural context?

Read the following article, which looks at the Chinese version of an American TV series *Ugly Betty*, then try to answer the questions.

? Fung, A., and Zhang, X. (2011) 'The Chinese Ugly Betty: TV Cloning and Local Modernity', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 14(3): 265–76.

- ? 1 The research for this paper adopted a 'mixed-methods' approach. What research methods were used and did they elicit the kind of information required to achieve the researchers' main aims?
- ? 2 What were the main modifications *Ugly Wudi*'s producers made to the series?
- ? 3 In what ways does the political and economic context of China impinge on the making of the series?
- ? 4 The authors discuss 'the global popular aesthetics of modern television dramas'. What are these aesthetics and can they really be said to be 'global'?
- ? 5 Does the evidence from this paper support the idea that *globalization* is leading to a uniform global culture, or does it show that *glocalization* is a better characterization of contemporary global trends? (Chapter 4 covers both globalization and glocalization.)

Thinking it through

? Sociologists have long sought to understand the relationship between the emergence and spread of new technologies and their social context. Do some technologies 'take off' because they fulfil a need or are they devised and marketed to *create* newly perceived 'needs'? Do technological devices shape and transform societies or do societies bring into being appropriate technologies at particular times?



Read the article by Ben Agger (2011) entitled 'iTime: Labour and Life in a Smartphone Era', *Time and Society*, 20(1): 119–36, which looks at the emergence of the smartphone. Consider the way the author addresses and answers the questions noted above. How does the paper theorize the social impact of the smartphone and what conclusions does it draw? What kind of theoretical position would you say this is? How satisfactory do you find the paper's discussion of smartphone use and this device's 'transforming potential' in society?

Society in the arts



One of the Internet's success stories of recent times is the rise of social networking, which has very rapidly become part of the everyday routines of many people's lives. One of the more successful social networking sites is Facebook, which claimed over 750 million active users worldwide in 2011.



The founding of Facebook is dramatized in the film *The Social Network* (2010), directed by David Fincher. Watch the film and take notes on:



- how the idea for Facebook came into being – was this purely intentional, mainly accidental or some other way?
- what kind of people were the founders – technology 'nerds', business entrepreneurs, capitalistic investors or something else?
- how the rapid growth of Facebook is explained in the film – was it fulfilling an existing demand, did it create its own demand or was it clever marketing, for example?



Given that membership is free but the founder, Mark Zuckerberg, is a multi-billionaire, how does Facebook actually make money? Sociologically, is Facebook anything more than just another profit-seeking, Internet-based company?

Further reading



An excellent introductory text covering all of the issues in this chapter and much more is Danielle Albertazzi and Paul Cobley's (2009) *The Media: An Introduction* (3rd edn, Harlow: Longman), which is logically structured and well written. James Slevin's (2000) *The Internet and Society* (Cambridge: Polity) is also a useful book on the social impact of the Internet. For new forms of media, you could try Martin Lister, John Dovey, Seth Giddings, Iain Grant and Kieran Kelly's (2008) *New Media: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge), which does exactly what it says.



On media theories, a good place to start is with Kevin Williams's (2003) *Understanding Media Theory* (London: Hodder Arnold), which is very clear and aimed at introductory level. A broader discussion can then be found in David Hesmondhalgh and Jason Toynbee's (2008) edited collection *The Media and Social Theory* (London: Routledge).



Marie Gillespie's (2005) *Media Audiences* (Buckingham: Open University Press) is a worthwhile edited collection which shows what can be learned from research into media audiences. On the difficult problems created by global media



ownership, a good guide is Gillian Doyle's (2002) *Media Ownership: The Economics and Politics of Convergence and Concentration in the UK and European Media* (London: Sage).



Those looking to pursue media studies further could try Gill Branston and Roy Stafford's (2010) *The Media Student's Book* (5th edn, London: Routledge). Then, David Deacon, Michael Pickering, Peter Golding and Graham Murdock's (2007) *Researching Communications: A Practical Guide to Methods in Media and Cultural Analysis* (2nd edn, London: Hodder Arnold) should be useful for those looking to carry out their own piece of media research.



For a collection of original readings on communication and the media, see the accompanying *Sociology: Introductory Readings* (3rd edn, Cambridge: Polity, 2010).

Internet links



Additional information and support for this book at Polity:
www.politybooks.com/giddens

The Foundation for Information Policy Research – UK-based think tank studying the interaction between ICT and society:
www.fipr.org



Indymedia UK – British-based 'grassroots' site which aims to provide an alternative platform to the mainstream news and mass media:
www.indymedia.org.uk



OECD, ICT Homepage – lots of comparative data on the 'Internet economy':
www.oecd.org/internet

Theory.org – playful postmodern site on links between media and identities:
www.theory.org.uk



Glasgow University Media Group's own website:
www.glasgowmediagroup.org

Ofcom – the UK's independent media regulator site, which has some useful surveys:
www.ofcom.org.uk



The Broadcasters' Audience Research Board – lots of research and surveys on audiences here:
www.barb.co.uk