Features of media ownership: Lords of the Global Village

Bagdikian pointed out that even 25 years ago the concentration of media ownership meant that a handful of global media companies and ‘moguls’ (he called them “Lords of the Global Village”) dominated the world’s mass media.

The features of media ownership include the following:

• Concentration of ownership- most of the media of all kinds are concentrated in the hands of a few very large companies
• Vertical integration- concentration of ownership within a single medium e.g. one company owning several newspapers and owning all stages in the production and distribution of the product.
• Horizontal integration- media owners have interests in a range of media, such as newspapers, magazines, cable and satellite TV, much etc.
• Global ownership- media ownership is international- the owners have global media empires, with interests in many different countries of the world
• Conglomeration and diversification- media companies are often part of huge conglomerates (companies that have a diversity of interests in a wide variety of products besides the media). E.g. virgin has an airline, train company, phones etc.
• Global conglomeration- not only is media ownership international, with media companies operating in global markets producing many different media products, but the conglomerates they are part of are also global conglomerates.
• Synergy- this is what happens when media companies produce, promote and sell a product in a variety of forms, thereby promoting and enhancing sales of that product and related spin-offs.
• Technological convergence- media companies try to maximise sales of their products by promoting and making them available in a variety of formats which can be accessed on a single device.

The concentration of ownership is clearly illustrated by the media in the USA-Bagdikian confirmed by the 2011 Fortune 500 list that 5 global-dimension firms own most newspapers, magazines, book publishers, radio and TV stations in the USA. These firms have major holdings in all the media. Each medium covers the entire country and the owners prefer stories that can be used anywhere and everywhere.

The media and ideology:
- Ideology refers to a set of ideas, values and beliefs that represents the outlook, and justifies the interests of a social group.
- The ideological role of the media is concerned with the extent to which the media socialise audiences into a particular view of the world and the society in which they live, often manufacturing a consensus around a central set of values.
- This is often achieved by the media producing messages that they expect audiences to respond to in a particular way—> this is what Morley called the preferred/dominant reading.

Marxists see societies as having a dominant ideology which is that of the dominant class in society- it justifies the social advantages of wealthy, powerful and influential groups in society and justifies the disadvantages of those lacking wealth and power.
- This dominant ideology is spread through the population by what Marxist Althusser called ideological state apparatuses.
- These are agencies like the media and education system which seek to induce a false consciousness of peoples exploitation and their real interests by persuading them to accept that everyone benefits from the way society is organised.
The various economic and organisational pressures including the desire to make money, to attract large audiences and hence advertising, and the organisational pressures generated by rolling news mean that some news items are more likely to be ignored than others for fear of offending owners or audiences or advertisers. 

- Through agenda setting, and giving more prominence to some issues than others, the media are socially constructing the news and encouraging audiences to think about the most important issues and what they should be concerned about.

Gatekeeping
- The media’s power to refuse to cover some issues and to let others through. 
- Sometimes media does not cover issues either because journalists and editors think they lack interest to readers and viewers, or because they regard them as too offensive, controversial or threatening to existing society. 
- Welfare benefit fraud by the poor is widely reported, but not tax evasion by the rich—this results in calls for tightening up benefit claims procedures rather than strengthening those agencies concerned with chasing tax evaders.

Norm-setting
- Describes the way the media emphasise and reinforce conformity to social norms, and seek to isolate those who do not conform by making them the victims of unfavourable media reports. 
- Norm setting is achieved in 2 main ways
  1. Encouraging conformist behaviour—such as not going on strike, obeying the law, helping people etc. Advertising often reinforces gender role stereotypes.
  2. Discouraging non-conformist behaviour—media often give extensive and sensational treatment to stories about murder etc. by emphasising the serious consequences that follow for those who break social norms—these stories are giving ‘lessons’ in how people are expected not to behave.

This norm-setting is also achieved through media representations
- The processes of agenda setting, gatekeeping and norm setting act as forms of social control, as they mean some events are simply not reported and brought to the public attention.
- Meaning that some of those stories that are reported may be singled out for unfavourable treatment.
- In these ways, the media can define what the important issues are, what ‘news’ is, what the public should and shouldn’t be thinking about and what is regarded as ‘normal’ behaviour in society.

The presentation of news
- The physical position of a news story on a website or in a newspaper, the order of importance given to stories in TV news bulletins, the choice of headline etc will all influence the attention given to particular issues. 
- Some issues may not be covered at all if journalists or camera crews are not available. A story may be treated sensationaly and it may even be considered of such major importance as to justify a TV or radio ‘newsflash’.
- The media can also create false or biased impressions by the language used in news reporting:
  - Emotive language— which stirs up emotions— may be used to liven up a story, placing a dramatic angle on events and thereby grabbing the audience’s attention.
  - Words like ‘pointless’ ‘trouble makers’, ‘thugs’, ‘rioters’ etc encourage people to have a negative view of the people or events reported.
Conclusion: a propaganda model of the media?
-It is suggested that the media generally present only a partial and biased view of the world, with some subjects posing a threat to powerful interests either distorted or ignored by the media.
-What counts as news is a manufactured product that reflects the interests of powerful groups and is produced within a framework of the dominant ideology in society.
-**Herman and Chomsky** adopt a propaganda model of the media— they suggest that main-stream media news and commentary are shaped by and propagandise on behalf of the powerful social interests that control them.
-**Structural factors** such as ownership and control, market forces etc create a network of shared interests and relationships between the media, those who make the news, and those who have the power to define it and explain what it means.
-However, pluralists point out that media competition and the need to attract audiences also mean that journalists do occasionally expose injustice or corruption in government and business.
-The rise of the new media has also begun to undermine the power of the mainstream media organisations as **citizen journalism opens up the possibility of alternative views being made available to millions across the globe.**

4. Media representations of age, class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and disability

**Media representations and stereotyping**
-One of the issues that has interested media sociologists has been the categories and images that are used to portray social groups to media audiences, such as images or minority ethnic groups, men and women, the disabled etc.
  - They portrayals are known as media representations.
- **Media representations** very often conform to and create stereotypes— generalised, oversimplified views of the features of a social group, allowing for few individual differences between members of the group.
- Media stereotypes act like codes that give audiences quick and easy-to-understand images of groups, while at the same time they construct meanings and interpretations, and such stereotypes may form the basis for treating members of some groups differently from others.

The media gaze
- Media content does not reflect the social diversity that characterises our society, but the perspective of the predominantly male, able-bodied white upper and middle class who own and control the media, and produce media content.

Symbolic annihilation
-One of the recurring themes in media representations is the way that some groups, are omitted, condemned or trivialised in the media, under-represented or only appear in a limited number of roles.
- Gerber and Gross and Tuchman et al. referred to this process as symbolic annihilation and suggested that this could give a distorted impression of some social groups or erase them from public consciousness altogether.
- Guntlett cautions that there is a diversity of media, a diversity of representations and a diversity of audiences and it therefore cant be assumed that media representations will either be consistent or have the same effect on audiences.
- People may therefore ignore, accept or reject media representations, or even pick ‘n’ mix media representations in a creative way to forge their own identities.
Cohen argues that young people are relatively powerless and an easily identifiable group to blame for society’s ills.

Consequently they have often been used as scapegoats by the media to create a sense of unity in society, by creating a moral panic against the folk devils who pose a threat to society and uniting the public against a common ‘enemy’.

As a result of these moral panics, all young people may then get labelled and stereotyped as potentially troublesome or as an anti-social problem group.

It should be remembered that it is these same young people who are the major users of the new media- this means media stereotyping can be combated by young people themselves through citizen journalism.

Representations of older people

Older people are often either largely invisible in the media or are presented in quite negative ways.

Cuddy and Fiske showed that in the US, TV portrayed 1.5% of its characters as elderly, with most of them in minor roles, and that older adults were more likely than any other age group to appear as figures of fun and comic relief.

Elderly people suffer from negative stereotyping in the media perhaps more than any other identifiable social group apart form youth.

Old age is generally represented as an undesirable state: being poor, in ill health, forgetful, a burden etc are all typical stereotypes.

However, it is not uncommon to see older men presented in a positive light e.g. sexual partners of younger women in Hollywood movies or as ‘wise old men’.

There are few positive images of older women who are often symbolically annihilated because women are, in media imagery, expected to be forever young and youthful, and there are not many positive roles to which as they grow older.

White et al. found that older viewers thought they tended to be stereotyped on TV and that there was a lack of representation of middle-aged and older women on TV.

The growing number of older people in the population with money to spend (‘the grey pound’) means that we might expect more positive images of ageing to emerge, and more positive roles for older women.

General features of representations of social class

1. The mainstream media gaze means representations of social class are filtered through the eyes of the rich and powerful owners and the media professionals who produce media content. This results in:

   • More favourable stereotypes of the upper and middle classes than the working class or the poor
   • An over-representation of the upper and middle classes and an under-representation of the working class
   • The portrayal of the working class in a more restricted range of roles than the middle-class.

2. Jones suggests that the media gives the impression ‘we’re all middle class now’, with the values and lifestyles of the middle class as the norm, to which everyone should aspire to.

3. Class is generally represented as a lifestyle choice rather than as an economic category- Lawler suggests ‘taste’ is used as a symbol of class identity. People’s lives are seen as shaped by their individual choices and tastes in the consumer goods they buy to form their lifestyles.

The focus is on the individual, rather than on their social class and the patterns of structural inequality in the distribution of wealth, income and life chances.
- The IWMF (international women’s media foundation) found that in UK news companies, women were marginalised and faced a ‘glass ceiling’ - an invisible barrier to progress in their careers.

- According to Women in Journalism, in 2011, 74% of news journalists on national newspapers were men and there were twice as many male editors as women.

2. The male gaze- Neo-Marxists like the GMG and Marxist feminist and radical feminist writers point to the way representations of gender are filtered through the media gaze of the pre-dominantly male-dominated media establishment.

- This means that women are portrayed through what Mulvey called the male gaze, where men look at women as sexual objects, using camera angles that focus on women’s sex appeal to provide pleasure for men.

3. The under-representation and stereotyping of women in media content- The Global Media Monitoring Project in a study of media across the world found about 76% of the people heard or read about in print, radio and TV news were male.

- When women were interviewed or heard in the news, they appeared mainly as ‘ordinary’ people, whereas men were presented more often as ‘experts’.
- Cumberbatch notes that women are less likely than men to grow older on TV - women also tend to appear in a narrower range of roles than men.

4. Patriarchal ideology and the symbolic annihilation of women- Feminist writers suggest that the media tends to be patriarchal and spreads patriarchal ideology.

- Tuchman described the symbolic annihilation of women involving the 3 aspects of trivialisation, omission and condemnation of women in the media.

The media and the social construction of gender differences

- The media are generally considered as an important influence on the social construction of gender differences between men and women.
- Connell considers that gender identities are constructed by the media and reproduce hegemonic stereotypes of men and women.

- The media create and reinforce these hegemonic gender stereotypes in a number of ways - the media often promote what Wolf calls the ‘beauty myth’—> the idea that women are assessed primarily in terms of their appearance.

- Tebbel suggested that no other time in history have women been so preoccupied with magazines, TV and films etc that promote the ‘ideal’ body shape for women.

- There are often very different types of story and magazine aimed at males and females. Romantic fiction is almost exclusively aimed at females.

- Children Now found that female characters were severely under-represented in video games, accounting for only 16% of all characters.

Female representations and stereotypes

- Wold and Tebbel suggested that women in the media have traditionally been shown as young and sexually attractive.
- TV, film and popular magazines are full of images of women and girls who are typically white, extremely thin and heavily made up.
- Women are more commonly shown indoors at home and are presented as emotional and unpredictable.

Female stereotypes include:

- THE WAG- the wives and girlfriends of men who are concerned with beauty, love, romance, being a good partner and keeping their men.
money. Stereotypes provide a simple and effective way of satisfying the wishes of both audiences and media organisations.

- Liberal feminists: see media representations as a product of the under-representation of women in male dominated media organisations, which encourages a male view of the world. This will change as women gain more power in media organisations, enabling them to break through the glass ceiling.

- Marxists and Marxist feminists: see media imagery of gender as rooted in the need to make profits. Media owners and the producers of media content need to attract advisers, and the advertisers need stereotypes to promote sales of cosmetics, diets, fashions etc.

- If audiences weren’t persuaded to be concerned about these things then there would be no market and no profit.

- Marxist feminists share with radical feminists the view that gender representations are driven by patriarchal ideology but they emphasise that this ideology is linked to social class inequality.

- Radical feminists: see media representations as arising from the necessity to promote and reproduce patriarchy and patriarchal ideology. The media world, like the world in general, is a man’s world which seeks to keep women in a narrow range of stereotyped roles where they are subordinate to men.

- Media generated stereotypes of femininity discourage women from making the most of the opportunities available to them, and undermine any threat to male dominance in society.

Are media stereotypes of gender changing?

- McRobbie suggests that in postmodern society, there is much more fluidity and flexibility in the representations of men and women in the media, in keeping with the changes in wider society.

- Gauntlett suggests that there is growing social expectation that women and men should be treated equally and this is increasingly reflected in the media.

- He sees the media as presenting a wider range of gender identities beyond traditional gender stereotypes.

Changing representations of females

- There is more emphasis now on independence and sexual freedom for women, and there is a growing diversity of imagery: women’s position in society is changing rapidly, they are becoming successful in education and better in the job market.

- As the pluralist model predicts, new magazines now cater for working women, leading to reduced gender stereotyping as women demand more from the media than increasingly outdated and patriarchal stereotypes.

- McRobbie argues that a new form of popular feminism has emerged, shown in young women’s magazines. These promote female assertiveness, being in control and enjoying sex as entitlements and encourage their readers to be more self aware, self-confident etc.

- Inness showed that women are being presented more as powerful ‘tough girls’ confronting danger and taking on roles that were once the preserve of men.

- Knight argues that although the portrayals described above show women who can take care of themselves in ways that have historically been seen as typically male.

- He suggests that female action heroes and other new gender representations have at least opened up choices for girls which enable them to explore and construct new identities outside the norms of traditional femininity.
Whilst the majority are likely to support and agree with the content and ‘slant’ of media messages, others might be critical of or even reject that content. It suggests that the media gradually influence the audience over a period of time— a drip drip effect—a subtle, ever-present process of brainwashing which gradually shapes people’s taken-for-granted common sense ideas and assumptions. There is a range of opinion, within the cultural effects model, of what exactly the balance is between the media’s power and influence over audiences, and the extent to which audiences can resist and reinterpret media content.

Encoding/decoding and reception analysis
- The analysis of how audiences receive and interpret media texts, and therefore what effects they have on audiences, is known as reception analysis.
- Hall suggests media texts are ‘encoded’ by those who produce them—they contain a particular intended meaning which they expect media audiences to believe.
- This meaning or encoding is what Hall called the dominant hegemonic viewpoint, which takes the dominant ideology for granted and accepts it as the norm.
- Hall suggests most audiences will receive and interpret (decode) media texts containing this dominant hegemonic viewpoint in the way they were intended or encoded, as the cultural hegemony of the dominant class means this viewpoint appears to audiences as the normal, natural, reasonable position.

Morely suggested that people might read, or decode and interpret media texts in one of three ways:
1. The preferred or dominant reading—audiences interpret or decode media texts in the same way they were encoded in the first place, and in the way media producers would prefer their audiences to believe.
2. A negotiated reading—audiences generally accept the preferred or dominant reading, but amend it to some extent, to fit their own beliefs and experiences.
3. An oppositional reading—audiences reject the preferred or dominant reading.
- Morely suggests that the particular reading that audiences adopt will be influenced by their own knowledge and experience, by the social groups to which they belong, and their social characteristics.

Selective filtering— an interpretivist approach
- The way encoding/decoding and reception analysis might take place in practice is shown by the interpretivist selective filtering approach.
- Klapper suggested that people have experiences of their own, make choices and interpret, or decode, and filter what they read, see or hear in the media.

Klapper suggests that there are 3 filters that people apply in their approaches and interpretations of the media:
1. Selective exposure—people must first choose what they wish to watch, read or listen to in the media, and they may choose only media messages that fit in with their existing views and interests.
2. Selective perception—people will react differently to the same message, and may choose to accept or reject a media message depending on whether or not it fits in with their own views and interests.
3. Selective retention—people will forget material that is not in line with their views and interests, and will tend to remember only those media messages with which they generally agree.