MASS MEDIA

1. The relationship between ownership and control of the media

‘The media’ may refer to a number of different but related things:

- The technology involved in communicating with large mass audiences without large mass audiences without any personal contract, such as TV, computers, smart phones, games consoles and satellites.
- The institutions and organisations concerned with mass communications in which people work, such as the press, cinema, broadcasting, advertising, publishing and web-related industries.
- The products of those institutions, such as the news, movies, tv soaps, newspapers, magazines, websites, books, films and computer games.
- The main media include terrestrial (earth-based) cable and satellite tv, radio, newspapers and magazines, books, films, DVDs, advertising, CDs, computer games, the internet and smartphones.

Traditional and new media:
- The media are now often divided into the ‘traditional’ and the ‘new’ media.
- The ‘traditional media’ refers to those mass media that communicated uniform messages in a one-way, non-interactive process to very large mass audiences, which were assumed to be homogenous (all having the same characteristics).
- This type of communication is associated with traditional broadcasting, like the terrestrial tv channels and BBC radios 1 and 2, and mass-circulation national and sunday newspapers.
- There is little consumer choice, beyond a few tv channels, radio stations or newspapers.
- The ‘new media’ refers to the interactive, screen-based, digital technology. And technology used for the distribution and consumption of the new digitised media content which emerged in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

Social media:
- The term ‘social media’ refers to a group of online and internet-based applications that are used for social interaction among large groups of people.
- Through applications and websites such as Twitter, Facebook, Youtube etc, people build social networks of friends and contacts with whom they share and exchange pictures and videos etc, which they have created themselves or by others.
- Social media has become an extremely significant form of media in the 21st century.

The power of the media:
- In the UK in 2014, 96% of homes had digital TV. 77% of homes had internet connections. 93% of adults owned a mobile phone.
- Around 7.5 million national newspapers are sold everyday.
- Society has become media-saturated, with the media becoming important sources of info, entertainment and leisure activity for large numbers of people.
- They have become key agents of secondary socialisation, and often have an important formative influence on the individual’s sense of identity and consumer spending choices.
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 sensationally 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.
The two-step flow model
- This model tackles the weaknesses of the hypodermic syringe model.
- It suggests that the media still have quite strong effects on audiences, but they do not simply passively and directly react to media content and will respond in a variety of ways to it.
- The key factor affecting these responses is the influence of ‘opinion leaders’ in the social networks to which audiences belong.
- Opinion leaders are those respected members of any social group who get info and form views from the media, who lead opinion and discussion in their social groups, and whom others listen to and take notice of.
- This model suggests that opinion leaders select, interpret and filter media texts before they reach mass audiences, and form their own opinions and interpretations.
- Opinion leaders then selectively pass on these messages to others in their social groups. Audiences therefore receive and are influenced by mediated (altered) messages received from opinion leaders whose views and opinions they respect.
- This model recognises that media audiences are not a mass of isolated individuals, but that the social groups to which people belong influence the opinions they hold and how they respond to the interpret media content.

Limitations of the two-step flow model
- There are probably more than 2 steps in the media’s influence. Media content could be selected and interpreted by many different individuals in different groups. Parents (as opinion leaders) may have one view, an opinion-leader workmate another view and a teacher another.
- This might mean ideas and interpretations of media content get bounced around in discussions in a variety of groups creating many steps in the flow of media influence.
- It rests on the basic assumption that the influence flows from the media to the audience and assumes that media audiences are more or less victims of media content, even if some messages are mediated first by opinion leaders.
- It suggests that people are very vulnerable to influence and manipulation by opinion leaders. It does not recognise that people may have views, opinions and experiences of their own on which to base their views of media content.
- It suggests the audience is divided into ‘active’ viewers/readers and ‘passive’ viewers/readers who are influenced by opinion leaders. It doesn’t explain why opinion leaders are directly influenced by media content when others are not.
- With the rise of the new media and social networking sites, the role of opinion leaders may be less influential, or replaced by a huge and diverse range of opinion leaders, as people receive a diversity of mediated messages from Facebook contacts, blogs, Youtube etc.

The cultural effects model- the ‘drip drip’ effect
- This model suggests that the media do have an effect on the audience.
- However, it does not regard media audiences as simply passive consumers of media texts.
- Neo-Marxists cultural effects theory recognises that the media are owned and heavily influenced by the dominant and most powerful groups in society, and their interests strongly influence the content of the media.
- Although cultural effects theory suggests the media will spread the dominant ideology in society, it accepts audiences interpret the media they consume, and may respond in different ways depending on their social characteristics.
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, 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 practise 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.
Such media violence is often blamed for increasing crime and violence in society—1993 murder of 2 year old James Bulger by two 10 year old boys. The judge in the case suspected “exposure to violent video films may in part be an explanation”. A review by Anderson showed a strong link between video violence and violent behaviour—media violence increased the likelihood of aggressive and violent behaviour, both immediately and long term.

Competing claims about the effects of violence in the media

- Copycatting or imitation: exposure to media violence causes children to copy what they see and behave more aggressively in the real world
- Catharsis: media violence does not make viewers more aggressive, but reduces violence as it allows people to live out their violent tendencies in the fantasy world of the media rather than in the real world
- Desensitisation—Himmelweit and Newson have suggested that repeated exposure to media violence has gradual ‘drip-drip’ long-term effects, socialising audiences into accepting a culture of violence in which violence is seen as a normal part of life and a legitimate means of solving problems.
- Sensitisation—exposure to violence in the media can make people more sensitive to the consequences of violence, and less tolerant of real life violence.
- Media violence causes psychological disturbance in some children—watching media violence frightens young children, causing nightmares etc.
- The exaggeration of the fear of violence— even if what is shown by the media will not make people violent, it may lead people to believe that we live in a violent society. Gerbner found those who watch more TV have more exaggerated fears about crime (exposed to more violence).

Methodological problems of researching media violence

-Livingstone points out that any link between media violence and violent behaviour does not mean media violence causes the behaviour.

-Having shown that those who watch more violent TV tend to be more aggressive, researchers must resolve 3 questions:
  - Whether more aggressive people choose to watch violent programmes (selective exposure)
  - Whether violent programmes make viewers aggressive (media effects)
  - Whether certain social circumstances make people more aggressive and lead them to watch more violent TV (a common third cause)

-Livingstone and Ferguson point out that the media effects models have tried to resolve these issues by using research in lab conditions

Bandura’s Bobo doll experiment

-Exposed 3 groups of children to violent scenes involving attacks with a mallet on large, self-righting, inflatable plastic doll.
- One group was shown the doll being attacked by an adult in real life, another group was shown the same adult attacking the doll in a film, and a third group was shown the same scene involving cartoon characters, fourth group of children were not exposed to any violent scenes.
- When the first 3 groups were later placed in a room with a similar doll, they acted in the same violent ways they had observed earlier.
- The 4th group of children who had not been exposed to any violent scenes displayed no violence—the conclusion drawn was that exposure to violence causes violence among those who see it.
-Jenkins argues that the process of technological convergence, bringing together multiple media in the same device, has led to a much more significant process of cultural convergence where consumers are encouraged to seek new info and make connections between dispersed contents from a range of media.

Features of the new media
-Lister suggests that what distinguishes the ‘new’ media from traditional media are 5 main concepts- digitality, interactivity, hypertextuality, dispersal and virtuality.

Digitality
-‘using computers’ where all data is converted into numbers which can then be sorted, distributed and picked up via screen-based products, like mobile phones etc

Interactivity
-Consumers have an opportunity to engage or interact with a variety of media, and because of convergence, they can do this at the same time as creating their own material, customising media to their own wishes.
-This interactivity is also found in new digital TVs and particularly those which are also connected to the internet
-Jenkins suggests this interactivity has led to:
  • Participatory culture- consumers produce media content which producers consume and then incorporate into new media texts. There has been a shift from information-reception to information-production on the part of media audiences. Jenkins suggests this gives consumers more control over media content.
  • Collective intelligence- using the new media has become a collective process, with interactivity creating a ‘buzz’ between users. Jenkins suggests that collective intelligence is a new source of media power.

Hypertextuality
-The links which form a web of connections to other bits of info, which give users a way of searching, interacting with and customising the media for their own use.

Dispersal
-The way the new media have become less centralised, more adapted to individual choices with a huge growth of media products of all kinds, which have become a part of everyday life.
-The routine use of the internet for information, shopping and entertainment, email, TV etc all show how the media have penetrated into the fabric of everyday life.
-The production of media content itself is now becoming more generally dispersed throughout the population, rather than restricted to media professionals.

Virtuality
-The various ways people can now immerse themselves in unreal interactive experiences in virtual worlds created by new technology, and also create for themselves imaginary identities in online communication and networking sites.

Who uses the new media?
-The new media are beginning to overtake the traditional media as a means of mass communication. Internet use across Europe is now around 14 hours a week per person of TV viewing according to a Microsoft survey.
-The traditional media, like newspapers and TV have difficulty competing with the internet for advertising income, and advertisers now spend more on internet than traditional media advertising.
- Many national newspapers and TV stations now have their own websites, reaching millions more than their printed papers or TV channels do.
- Spam is becoming a cheap means for advertisers to reach masses of people.

Stratification in the new media
- Users of the new media are not a homogenous group, sharing the same social characteristics. As in most areas of social life, there is also stratification in cyberspace, with media users differentiated by social class, gender, age, location.
- Jones suggests that patterns in internet access and use tend to reflect and amplify existing inequalities.
- Dutton and Blank found 91% of those with higher education had used the internet, compared to 34% or those with no formal qualifications.

Social class inequalities
- Broadly, the middle and upper classes are the biggest users of the new media as they can more easily afford it.
- Those in the poorest social classes have the least access to the internet and other new media at home, as they are less able to afford it, and 65% of those who are not online are in the bottom two social classes.
- Thus there is evidence of a digital divide between the information-rich digital ‘haves’ who have access to online information and services, and the information-poor digital ‘have-nots’.
- Helsper shows that a digital underclass was forming in Britain, with those who have lower education levels and no employment lagging far behind other groups in their access to the internet.
- The internet is now such a normal part of life that those who lack internet access or the skills and confidence to use it experience a form of social exclusion.

Age differences
- There is a substantial generation gap in access to and use of the new media
- Boyle suggests this is because young people have grown up with the latest developments in the new media.
- However there is also evidence of clear social inequality among young people.
- Jones points out that while young people have the highest levels of access and use, around 10% of 16-24 year olds from disadvantaged social backgrounds are likely to remain relatively infrequent users of the internet.

Ofcom found young people (16-24) compared to old people:
- Are greater internet users and spend more time online, more likely to have the internet at home, more likely to own and use a smartphone, more likely to use a mobile phone to go online, more likely to get their news on mobile devices
- Are more attached to, aware of and confident in using new media technology
- Use the new media differently from older people: more likely to see the internet as a form of fun, relaxation and a pastime. They are also more likely to use the internet for work/studies info, entertainment and leisure info.

Gender differences
- There are some significant differences between men and women in the way they use and relate to the new media:
- Fixed games consoles and tablet computers are more popular among males than females, but e-readers are more popular among women for their reading
- Men spend three times as much time as women watching videos online