

The sociological aspects of the media and popular culture



The media influence how people experience social life. Media such as newspaper, television and film, are important sources of information, education and entertainment. It can be used to learn more about the world and the people in it. In this regard it can be said that the media represent, interpret and endorse aspects of social experience (O'Shaughnessy and Stadler, 2005).

The media are also implicated in social regulation, or in other terms, the government of society. The media are implicated in government and politics in an obvious way because modern systems of democracy are conducted through the media. But the media have a bigger role to play in government by structuring how society is controlled and maintained. In addition, while the media are owned and run by government, commercial, and community interests, commercial interests dominate.

In this regard there is cause to argue that the media serve the interests of those who own them. Adorno and Horkheimer have argued that the mass media in particular operates as a 'culture industry' (Van Krieken et al, 2006: 441). It supplies ideological products for mass consumption that preserve and extend the dominating position of the ruling classes. There is also an argument that corporate monopolisation of media ownership and modes of production mean that the media have become the instrument of private capital and mediated colonisation. The essay will discuss the sociological aspects of the media and popular culture with reference to the social impact of the internet and related technologies and the role of media in globalisation. Probably the biggest technological change in media and

communication in recent times has involved the rise of the internet and related technologies.

The internet has added a new, powerful, and rapidly changing technology to media and communication. Unlike the broadcast media, the internet also has pronounced interactive features because it allows people to communicate with each other. Innovations such as FaceBook and MySpace combine images, text, and messaging to create new possibilities for social interaction. Websites such as YouTube combine broadcast media with the self-directed properties of the internet. SMS texting has revolutionised the social lives of many people. All these media allow people to sustain relationships across time and space in ways that have never before been possible.

Some are concerned however, that over-reliance on such forms of communication reduces the importance of face-to-face social experience. Others argue that such media present new ways of defining our identities and establishing new kinds of social interaction (Castells, 2000). Since its introduction on a public scale in the 1990s, the internet has been associated with many changes in social experience. Many aspects of social life such as education, work, commerce and even personal relationships have changed through the internet. However, researchers have found that, at least in the early years, access to the internet is shaped according to gender, class, ethnicity and education. During the 1990s the typical information technology user was a white, male, professional with a background in IT.

This bias in internet access was named the 'digital divide' to point out the implied social inequalities. It was said that the internet was managed and

exploited by one group at the expense of others (Mosco, 2004) but today the digital divide no longer exist to an extend it once did simply because of the growing number of internet users worldwide. In terms of sociological aspects cyberculture and social networking media. The term cyberculture is useful because it provides the basis for simultaneously addressing the new media technologies and their social effects. As such, cyberculture draws attention to several aspects of the society-technology link: the effects of new media technologies themselves, for example, email or SMS texting; the merging of the social and technological, for example, cybercultures are reliant on new media technologies but they are also understood as social practices and the assumptions, habits, rules and etiquette related to the use of these technologies. For example, SMS texting relies on conventions of communication that have been invented by texters.

All of which illustrate, the rising of new social groups. In order to determine the role of media in globalisation, it is important to look at cultural industries, the public sphere, and monopolisation. In terms of cultural industries it is essential to examine the work of Adorno. He believed that popular culture was not simply for entertainment and that the growth in popularity of mass media such as radio and television was related to processes of social exploitation and provided methods for the control of large populations. In particular, Adorno believed that culture such as fine art, music and especially the popular mass media had become incorporated into capitalism. The modes, values and effects of mass production have therefore invaded culture.

(Van Kreiken et al, 2006). Adorno and his followers argued that the culture industry adopts the methods of industry in general. As such, the methods applied to producing culture for popular consumption have the effect of reducing its cost and distributing it to many people. But such modes of production reduce its aesthetic value, with consequences for the quality of culture in general. The culture industry necessarily standardises, stereotypes, schematises culture to make it available to as many people as possible in an efficient manner. Mass consumption of such cultural products becomes an empty exercise of acquisition and accumulation. Adorno also believed that the culture industry had psychological dimensions concerning alienation. Industrial societies, and some would argue hyper-mediated societies such as ours, are alienating.

Because of the focus on individual achievement in terms of financial success and other material symbols of social power, the relationships between individuals are hampered and destroyed. Individuals therefore become alienated from each other and ultimately from themselves. The cultural products of the mass media become a focus for us because they help us compensate for such alienation. The other psychological dimension of the culture industry is narcissism. Narcissism is a term derived from psychoanalysis that refers to a flaw in ego development where the individual falls in love with themselves at the expense of forming healthy relationships with others. Narcissistic people use other people to satisfy their own emotional needs.

According to Adorno, such individuals put their own needs ahead of those of others. Mass media products cater to narcissism because they address the <https://assignbuster.com/the-sociological-aspects-of-the-media-and-popular-culture/>

individual and satisfy their emotional needs to feel special and the centre of the world. Mass culture reflects and caters to the narcissism in all of us because it provides the basis for the immediate gratification of our selfish impulses and desires. A central theme of Adorno's thesis is that the culture industry is the main method for the circulation of ideology, or beliefs about individuals and society that actually serve the interests of those in power.

The culture industry therefore has a political purpose because it assists with the stabilisation of a world view that supports forms of domination and in particular the material and ideological domination of the working classes. Another critical perspective regarding the media concerns the way profit-making media companies operate on the global stage. The key concerns here relate to the concentration of ownership and the related concerns over the scope, quality and independence of media products. Coupled with the global reach of forms of mediated communication, a related concern is the imposition of media products, and specifically westernised products, onto other cultures. Modern corporations seek profit through control of production and the creation of efficiencies.

The two main processes are vertical and horizontal integration (Croteau and Hoynes, 2003). Vertical integration is when a corporation owns all the different steps in the production of a single media product. For example, one company may own the publishing house for a book, the printing company, the shipping company that distributes the book, and the advertising company that promotes the book. Horizontal integration is when a media company owns different forms of media, for example a publishing house, a newspaper, and a film studio.

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There are corporations that combine vertical and horizontal integration, giving them enormous control over media production and transmission. The practice of integrating media companies has reduced the overall number of media corporations in the world to a handful. This means that global media production is in theory controlled by a handful of people. News Corporation owns many newspapers across the world, Twentieth Century Fox, US TV, and Sky. Time Warner/AOL owns newspapers, magazines, film studios (Warner Bros), TV stations (CNN), and Internet companies.

It is said that integration is good for consumers because it makes media products available in a cost efficient way. But there are also concerns that such corporations choose to make only certain products that suit their new modes of integrated production. For example, books that can be made into films will be published. But those books that do not translate to the screen are ignored. There is a danger therefore that media monopolies may lead to the homogenisation of media culture, slowly but powerfully reducing the scope and originality of literature, film and other forms of media.

Academics have also argued that the global circulation of homogenised and westernised media products is a form of mediated colonisation. A concern here is that media companies export their products to all parts of the world and therefore displace local media cultures. In conclusion the internet and related technologies have shaped the way we manage our daily lives. It influences our work, how we learn, and how we communicate. It also influences our personal lives, for example, the way we portray ourselves in society in terms of image and personally. In terms of globalisation,

globalisation is fuelled by cultural industries and capitalism whereby profit-making media companies operate on the global stage.

This causes concern as it may lead to mediated colonisation, but it does have certain benefits