

# Pluralist theories of the mass media media essay



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Sociologists are interested in the mass media because of the powerful effect it has in people's lives both politically and socially. Mass media is forms of communication directed to big mass audiences without any personal contact. This can be by radio, television, internet, billboards and so on. This essay is going to explain and critically evaluate the Marxist and pluralist theories of the mass media. An explanation of the media will also be included.

Marxist theorists suggest that the media is dominated by the ruling class who are the major owners of the media corporations, which gives them total control and manipulation of media content and audiences in their own interest. In the view of the Marxist the media is seen as part of an ideal ground in which various class views are battled out. However, pluralists suggest that there is no dominant ruling class. They insist that the role of the media is to promote freedom of speech. In fact they see society as a multipart of rival groups and interests, of which none take the leading role all of the time. Pluralists believe that the government has a key position in regulating media content and ownership.

Marxists view known as the instrumentalist approach makes several claims, of which the pluralists such as James Whale (1997) argue that Marxists case neglects important facts, and that it exaggerates the power of the media. Some of key claims are: That the owners of the mass media have direct control over the ideas communicated through the mass media, but the pluralists argue that it is not all owners who try to control media content. They actually do point out that there has been a witness of cases where top

newspaper editors have disputes with owners over control of editorial content.

Marxists continue to claim that mass media audiences are seen as passive consumers, of the distorted and partial accounts of news and the cheap distracting entertainment, which the media provides them with. As a result of this the mass audience just accepts whatever is presented to them, whereby a public opinion could be easily manipulated by the mass media. Pluralists criticise this point by arguing that the media owners and those who work for the media can't afford to ignore the views and interests of the public to buy or listen to what they want.

Marxists claim that the capitalist owners of the mass media intentionally aim to promote ideas that give them huge massive benefits to their class of which they are members. But on the other hand pluralists call that an unhelpful concept. They go on to say that it is a ruling class ideology. Marxists point out that the reason why pluralists are very critical to Marxists instrumental accounts of the media is because pluralists themselves are often part of or funded by the media industries.

Having to consider the above evaluation, now let us look at how sociologists explain the main ways in which the news is created by the media.

Sociologists have argued that the process by which journalists create the news is a manufacturing process and that its production processes are quite predictable. Sociologist Phillip Schlesingers (1978) gave some results about the news study, by saying that journalists use a news diary to make their job easier, and that many articles can be prepared in advance due to tight

deadlines. However, sociologists agree to a certain point that journalists are still controlled in what they present to the public because they are guided by news values, shared norms and values which makes them believe that it is essential to the public.

Results drawn by researchers like Galting and Ruge (1981) showed that two key sets of factors involved in determining journalist news values are bureaucratic and cultural. This means that news items must be immediate and refer to current affairs, brief, simple and exiting. They insist that news must focus on elite decision makers and on personalities rather than those issues. Overall, a conclusion can be drawn from the above to say that the whole process of making the news is socially constructed and that the media can have a considerable influence on public debate.

The fact that the public respond to a huge percentage of the media products, it has been proved that some reports are found to be misleading and over dramatised to give a good story. In a sense such stories are over exaggerated and they usually have a negative impact on the audience. Such reports cause moral panics and bring fear amongst society. After his research of gang fighting at the sea side, Stan Cohen argued that the media play a key role in creating moral panics. He drew a conclusion that the media over exaggerated in order to boost their sales and succeeded in attracting a huge number of readers.

Another recent example of moral panic was about the Nigerian man who tried to blow up an American bound airline. The result of that event has brought on security changes at airports around the world. In fact at

Heathrow airport a new security device which shows peoples nudity when they pass through, it was introduced shortly after the incident.

If we look further into how groups of people are represented in the media either by gender or ethnicity background, we find that women and ethnic minorities are under- represented in position of power and influence in the management of the media industry. On the side of gender, sociologists say that the mass media is patriarchal; women appear less than men on television. Many adverts portray women as either house wives or sex figures in the media. For example in the sun news paper, they have dedicated a page three that shows half naked women on a daily basis. This definitely keeps the male audiences hooked on such news paper.

There has been a great deal of research showing that media representations of men dominate the media and are more positive than that of women. For example, Dominick and Rauch (1972), Brelt and Cantor (1988), Cumberbatch (1990), found out that images of men were predominant in adverts, and that men are usually in more authoritative roles or in higher status occupation. They also claimed that the majority of voice -overs in adverts was male voices. Feminist sociologist Gaye Tuchman (1978) concluded that women are symbolically destroyed and marginalised in media representation.

On the other hand, studies have showed that media representations of ethnic minorities are tremendously presented in terms of negative stereotypes. So many newspapers tend to represent ethnic minorities as a threat to the public. This ranges from being criminals, dangerous, pitied or illegal immigrants. On television, ethnic minorities tend to be in restricted

range of roles. The broadcasting standards Commission (1999) found that ethnic minorities are more linked with arts, media, health and care roles than other roles such as legal professions.

Researchers such as Sarita Malik (2002) believed that there is a racialised regime of representation within which black are portrayed as having different experiences from other groups. She concluded that 'Whiteness' is portrayed as the norm. Karen Ross (2000) used focus groups of people from different ethnic minorities and she found out that each group was portrayed as homogeneous. Van Dijk (1991) used a hypodermic model and argued that newspapers have a major impact in developing a perception of immigration as a problem which may lead to racial attacks.

In conclusion mass media indeed affects society in many ways. There some positive and negative attributes from the mass media that influence society in today's world. These are either political or social issues.