

# The importance of understanding the media

[Media](#), [Advertising](#)



For most people today, the media are the main source of knowledge and entertainment in their everyday lives. Americans are said to watch more than four hours of television on average every day. That's 21 hours each week, two months per year, or the equivalent of watching nine years of non stop television over an average lifespan (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler 2008). This statistic, while still daunting, ignores other forms of media that are arguably more prevalent in every day life; smart phones, laptops and the newspaper to name a few. The media surround us, they are like the air we breath, ever present yet rarely ever considered (Croteau, Hoynes & Milan 2012). Who decides what I will read in the news today? Why should they have power over my own personal viewing? Those who control the media play a pivotal part in our everyday life and thus, we must clearly understand this control and the detrimental influence it could have on not only ourselves, but society as a whole. The media will serve the economic and political interests of whoever owns and controls it - whether this is private individuals interested in profit or governments interested in political control (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler 2008). The media is an industry. In Australia, it employs over 200, 000 workers and is a larger industry than wheat, wool and beef combined (Budarick 2013). Over time, this industry has shifted from a free market, to one which is dominated by very few large capitalist corporations. For example, in 1923 there were 26 metropolitan daily newspapers in Australia owned by 21 proprietors. There are only two national daily papers in Australia today, the Australian and the Australian Financial Review (Budarick 2013). The mass media products will often embody these capitalists ideologies that are than consumed by the mass

audience (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler 2008). The mass audience in its definition is not necessarily restricted to one's own nation, but in many instances will be widely distributed all over the world. This globalisation that many find to be a promising prospect can be viewed more realistically as the phenomenally successful extension of marketing and consumerism to the world community (Flew 2007). This is very common in westernized cultures, predominantly America; and is known as cultural imperialism (DeFleur & Dennis 1998). Critics claim that American powers deliberately use the media to impose western material culture and the many kinds of freedoms its democracy entails, thereby undermining and replacing traditional beliefs, values and lifestyles held by 'less developed' countries (DeFleur & Dennis 1998). In essence, the media are making us all the same and destroying marginalized cultures. Audiences of the mass media must ensure they retain their own beliefs and ways of life, rather than falling complacent with what is simply shown to them. Many people risk losing their own identity to cultural imperialism, making it imperative to understand the media and where it comes from. There is a growing concern that such owners' influence on media output is so great that it increasingly limits our information and gives them significant political power (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler 2008). We as consumers are becoming less and less reliant on our own thoughts; inculcating a loss of individuality and creating an 'obedience to hierarchy' (Budarick 2013). If people continue to do so, we are playing into the hands of large corporations, turning into 'robots', programmed to do and think as they dictate. Such control often can be further exemplified through the United States Government's views on war. The US have had several major

wars over the past century. In all cases, the White House was determined to go to war while the general population was far more reluctant and in fact lied to generate popular support, knowing the truth would be insufficient to generate the backing needed to carry out it out (McChesney 2005). The news media, by and large, went along uncritically with the propaganda campaign in wars that are now generally regarded as tragic mistakes (McChesney 2005). This did not change when President George Bush proposed the war on Iraq, in which there was no heightened skepticism nor any evidence demanded regarding his motives (McChesney 2005). Media outlets such as Fox News Channel and much of talk radio ridiculed and attacked anyone who dared question the President (McChesney 2005). There is said to be a difference between media in a democratic society and those in totalitarian nations, whereby the latter sees media outlets act as propaganda arms of state, promoting the narrow set of government sanctioned images and messages (Croteau & Hoynes 2003). The former is said to pride themselves on protecting freedom of the press and freedom of expression. However, as explained through the US, it could be said that the government in all nations can, to varying degrees, constrain the free activity of the media (Croteau & Hoynes 2003). Audiences must become adept at 'reading between the lines' in such scenarios and cannot simply consume what the media shows us. It is argued that peoples values can be corrupted by the media they consume (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler 2008). As we grow older, however, individuals become better at formulating their own ideas and this view diminishes. It is for this reason that the youth market is very important to advertisers and media outlets. Companies will often do extensive market

research into youth culture to identify emerging trends and then use the media to market the subcultural phenomena they have discovered (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler 2008). Young people are particularly vulnerable to such strategies because they are perceived to be impressionable and image conscious (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler 2008). Furthermore, they have not yet developed the ability to distinguish fact from fiction and may act in mimesis; creating significant moral panic. For example, media containing violent and/or sexual content could inadvertently legitimize unacceptable behaviour which they now deem to be normal or acceptable (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler 2008). Studies have shown that this commercial indoctrination of children is clearly leading to a wave of serious problems, from obesity to attention deficit disorder (McChesney 2005). Many nations have in fact banned television advertising to children for this reason, however, because it is extraordinarily profitable (McChesney 2005), it proceeds in most westernized cultures. We live in a time where technology is rapidly improving, and the youth of our society are the most susceptible to the media influences. It is imperative that such age groups develop a clear understanding of their viewing in order to ensure the welfare of both themselves and those they interact with. In a world where technology is growing considerably, the importance of understanding the media could not be greater. We are consumed by what the media shows us, and our ability to formulate our own ideas/opinions will be constricted if we do not understand where this information is coming from, who is providing this information and the validity of it all. We as consumers of the mass media may discover a loss of individuality, culture and considerable personal turmoil from a young age if

the media and its full capabilities are not adequately understood. References

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