

Leisure and media essay

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Society is constantly exposed to various forms of media, be it television, radio, newspapers or the growing internet, that portray either constructed or natural images of events and issues that consequently influence our view of the world, our behaviour and our leisure pursuits.

The extent to which individuals are either passive or active in recognising this significant influence on their leisure lifestyle are discussed throughout this essay from the perspectives of two sociological theories in relation to three core concepts concerning the media and society. The role of power between the media and society in relation to how the media chooses to depict events will be discussed through both a critical theory and post-foundational theoretical view point; the underlying signification of the media's images will be discussed through a critical theoretical view point and the effects of globalisation on the media landscape and thus society will be discussed through a post-foundational view point. These concepts are discussed through these sociological theories in order to determine the responsibilities professionals working in the field of leisure need to manage in addressing the media's significant influence on leisure. Critical theory is a sociological theory which argues that "social reality (is) the product of people giving meaning to events and objects" (Bessant & Watts 2002, p. 41). That there are certain individuals or groups in society, like the media, who have power and utilize this power by controlling what society perceives as objective reality (Habermas 1971) in order to further the notion of a capitalist society. Critical theorists believe that by exposing and promoting only certain leisure activities, the media are limiting the choice of consumers to only those leisure activities which are sellable (Clarke & Critcher 1985)

and thus forcing society to be passive in deciding their leisure activities.

Post-foundationalism is a sociological theory that rejects the idea that there is a singularly truth regarded by society as reality and rather “ emphasise(s) the idea of multiple knowledges, ethical and moral rules, and the multiple forms that social and political movements can take (Bessant & Watts 2002, p.

42). Post-foundationalists recognise the critical perspective that the media can be biased and controlling in what leisure activities they promote, but they identify that society still has the ability to be active in deciding what leisure activities they are exposed to and involved in by analysing and interpreting the media’s images through exposing themselves to new media outlets, like the internet, which offers a wide range of different perspectives on leisure activities or by actively participating in a range of different leisure activities available. A critical theory perspective argues that power is a “ restrictive influence on our freedom to act as we please” (Rojek 1985, p. 151) based on the notion of hegemony where there is one group in society which achieves domination or superiority of its ideas and values through cultural practices and permits (Gramsci 2001). They view the media as one of these groups who uses their power to maintain control over society by promoting leisure activities that reinforces the values of the elite and manipulating consumers to be passive and accepting of the images that are exposed to them in order to help maintain their power and control over society and fulfil their desire for profit. Herbert Marcuse reflects on this issue of how individual’s thinking becomes passive to the manipulation of the media: With the concentration of economic and political power and the

integration of opposites in a society which uses technology as an instrument of domination, effective dissent is blocked where it could freely emerge: in the formation of opinion, in information and communication (1971, p.

148-149). Marcuse refers to the concept called signification, which outlines that when an image or other signifier is presented there is an abstract meaning or metaphor signified with the image (Barthes 1973) which cannot be identified at face value and requires education and knowledge to identify. Critical theorists believe the media uses its power to influence society by hiding this abstract meaning or truth behind the leisure activities they promoted through use of biased and censorship, based on the motivation for profit, which restricts the audience's view of the leisure activity to that only of the image being presented. The use of this tactic by the media aims to subconsciously encourage consumers to be passive viewers of the media and readily accept the images presented, without being active in discovering the truth behind them. An example of the way the media uses its power to influence society's way of thinking is the advertising campaign of Bond Brewing in Australia during 1987. Bond Brewing aimed to tap into the female drinker market, by displaying advertisements that made it permissible for females to drink beer socially and among men. They attempted to make this type of leisure activity acceptable among society and apart of popular culture (Jonson 1993). Critical theorists would argue that the way Bond Brewing advertised this campaign positioned the viewer to agree with the idea being promoted and hence consumer the product being offered.

Although, at the time, the consumer was positioned to be in a state of ignorance over the motivations of Bond Brewing to promote alcohol among females which was to increase consumption of their beer and hence increase their profits. It also failed to highlight that alcohol is commonly known to cause violence and other social problem. A post-foundational perspective on power argues that it does not repress individuals, unlike critical theory argues, but that it enables them to exercise their freedom, as Foucault argues that all members of society have a degree of power which is expressed as relations “ within and between individuals, families and institutions” (Rojek 1985, p. 151).

They recognise that there are certain individual's or groups, like the media, in society that have a differential advantage in their use of power, but that society always has the ability to resist this power (Rojek 1985). They recognise that the media has significant power in influencing what forms of leisure activities society are exposed to, but it argues that individual's still have the power to resist being manipulated by the certain forms of the media and that they can become active in exposing themselves to other media outlets or other individuals within society which will give them a range of exposure to different types of leisure that will lead them to their own understanding, not the media's. Globalisation is the worldwide processes of breaking down national barriers “ brought about by new communications technology and the growth of multinational corporations” (Veal, A. J. and Lynch, R. 2001, p. 102).

There is concern that the world is becoming the “cultural empire” of the United States driven by consumerism and controlled by the media (Tomlinson 1991), but there is hope globalisation will help raise the awareness of national and local cultures and practices (Jonson 2003). A post-foundationalist would recognise that the media has a significant influence on whether both or neither of these issues raised come to fruition and their implications on our leisure. For example, due to the increased media exposure of international celebrities and foreign films during the last decade, the consumption market share of national films fell to 1% compared to foreign films in 2004 (ABS). Although due to the media’s promotion and links with overseas television networks, Australian produced television shows such as Neighbours have garnered success overseas, especially in Britain, and have given people an insight into Australian culture and identity. Post-foundationalist would argue that the internet is an important form of media that has made it more accessible for individuals to access a greater range of information and educational opportunities than television or newspapers. The internet is a convenient form of media that allows individuals to become more active in resisting the images portrayed by the media and forming their own opinions on what leisure activities they engage in.

It gives individuals the choice to decide what they want to be exposed too and gives them the power to take on the role of the media in expressing their own views and opinions regarding leisure. Although post-foundationalist also recognises that the internet is a much larger platform for people to display their power in attempting to shape other people’s views on leisure. I believe that professionals working as leisure providers have a responsibility

to use the media, while promoting their leisure services, in a manner which serves the needs of their business in maintaining profit, but that also takes into account the power relationships between themselves and the consumer. Leisure providers should view advertising of their services as a form of educating consumers of the benefits of their products, not how they can manipulate individuals, giving them a viable option which is going to help them attain the purpose of leisure which is to have an “enjoyable fulfilling experience... that enhance(s) individual and social development” (Jonson 2003).

An example of a leisure provider that are endeavouring to fulfil this objective is AFL Australia paying for advertisements during their games for AusKick which is an incentive to inform parents and children that AFL is a great way of participating in a team based sport, living an active lifestyle and engaging in a leisure activity. These advertisements refer consumers to their website, which informs them of information nights which helps give consumers a perspective, not from the company advertising the product, but from fellow consumers who have first hand experience. In conclusion, the media's influence on the leisure pursuits of society in relation to power, signification and globalisation were discussed using a critical theory and post-foundationalism viewpoint. Critical theorists argued that by the media promoting only certain leisure activities they were forcing society to be passive in deciding their leisure activities. While post-foundationalists agreed, it also argued that consumers have the opportunity to resist these forms of the media and become actively involved in deciding their leisure by seeking other forms of information (i.

. internet or consumers). In recommendation, leisure providers should aim to fill the leisure needs of society without abusing their power by manipulating consumers. References: Bessant, J. & Watts, R. 2002, *Sociology Australia* (2nd edn), Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, pp. 26-43. Habermas, J.

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