

# Mass communication theory assignment

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Introduction Mass society theory is an idea that media has strong influence towards people, it plays a role of shaping people's mind and perception of the social world and it is also to manipulate people's action with delicate, subtle and effective ways (Baran and Davis 2006, p. 43). Mass society theory has first introduced in the nineteenth century when there are disruptive consequences caused by modernization (Baran and Davis 2006, p. 52). At that time, mass media considered as a cause of social problems (Baran and Davis 2006, p. 52).

That was the yellow journalism era for mass newspapers (Baran and Davis 2006, p. 52). For instance, newspapers irresponsibly give out information, probably some sensational information which directly influence people's minds (Baran and Davis 2006, p. 45), when there are social problems occurs based on influences made by yellow journalism, people might blame on the mass society, this is also what mass society theory criticizing about. Mass society theory has come out with six basic assumptions about individual, the role of media, and the nature of social change (Baran and Davis 2006, p. 53).

These assumptions talk about the influences of the media towards individuals; it shows how people's minds are changed to the negative side. This paper is basically analyzing Malaysia society by using the mass society theory. Malaysia society will be analyzed based on the assumptions of mass society theory. The sources that used for analysis are news articles from The New Strait Times. Six assumption of mass society theory Among the six assumptions, one of them says that " media have the power to reach out and directly influence the minds of average people" (Davis 1976 cited in Baran and Davis 2006, p. 4). Average people here refer to the general public

also known as the member of folk culture; average people are also portrayed as “ being helpless before the manipulative power of media content” (Baran and Davis 2006, p. 54). It means the average people have no choice but to be influenced by the media, they have no protection. There is a news article found in New Strait Times which is applicable to this assumption. The news article reports about some bloggers who have actually belittle the king or Islam in their blog (Vasudevan 2007, p. 4).

Blogging is a new form of personal diaries; it is being published in the Internet. Blog is now widely used by people to share their diaries. Since it is very widely used, therefore there are no gatekeepers to control the content in blogs. Without gatekeepers, bloggers can post whatever they want in their blog, in this case, the government is actually troubled by the growth of irresponsible alternative media like blogs, these websites allow the publish of slander, lies and swearing, the use of harsh, degrading language and racial slurs without for the reader or those who concerned (Vasudevan 2007, p. ). When readers read these blogs, they might not have the ability to analyze the contents whether it is the truth, as they are only general public who have no idea about the lifestyle of a king, or those who are not Islam, they have no idea about Islam as well, when then have no idea about the accuracy of these content, probably they will believe it.

It directly changes the mind of the readers, in this case, those criticisms toward the king or Islam in the blogs mentioned, might not be the truth, but it has already planted in the mind of the readers, and it is hard to change the people’s mind once it is deeply set based on the information they first get.

This form of uncontrollable alternative media might give some idea to those

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who intentionally belittle the king and Islam to spread their negative idea by using their blogs.

This brings out another assumption of the mass society theory, which is “once people’s mind are corrupted by the media, all sorts of bad long-term consequences result- not only bringing ruin to individual lives but also creating social problems on a vast scale” (Marcuse 1941 cited in Baran and Davis 2006, p. 54). This assumption focuses on social problems that might be occurred once people’s mind is being corrupted by the media.

In the case of blogging, when the image of the king and Islam is being damaged, some social problems might occur, for instance, when the king loses his credibility, the internal security might be affected, when the general public do not support the king, they will lose confident to the country. If there is somebody who in tend to break down the existing government, this will be a stepping stone for him/her. In the other hand, if bloggers still keep on publishing negative information about Islam, it might also cause social problems.

When those unidentified information come to the eye of the general public who have no idea or who do not have detailed knowledge about Islam, they might start to discriminate Islam, discrimination is a very serious offence among races, in a multiracial country like Malaysia, if people from different races do not have mutual understanding, it is very difficult for them to live in the same community, people will start criticizing people from other races, they might start fighting with each other, all these can break down the harmony of a country.

Smoking is hazardous to health, doctors, nurses and others in the health industry are plays an important role to help smokers to quit themselves from this bad habit (New Straits Times 2007, p. 11). Even though the government is very aggressive in approaching the “ Tak Nak” campaign, but yet Malaysians still maintain to smoke some 30 million sticks of cigarettes in a day (New Straits Times 2007, p. 11). The number of smokers has never been decreased, the figure in smoke is going up to RM6 billion every year (New Straits Times 2007, p. 1). There are a few assumptions of the mass society theory are applicable in analyzing this news article. One of these assumptions is “ media have the power to reach out and directly influence the minds of average people” (Davis, 1967 cited in Baran & Davis 2006, p. 54). For the general public who are lacking of knowledge on certain issues, they will be easily influenced by the media. In the Internet, there are some websites intentionally portray the image of a smoking woman is glamorous (SmokingRachel. om 2005). When people look at those pictures they might have been influenced with it, they might think that smoke can make women become sexier and bewitched. They might believe what the media said or published and they might try to smoke in order to be sexier and bewitched. For those who are lacking of knowledge about the consequences that smoking might bring, they might follow what the media said as they cannot identify the truth and the media tactic; this is the results of changing of people’s mind.

The following Mass Society Theory’s assumption is “ average people are vulnerable to media because they have been cut off and isolated from traditional social institutions that previously protected them from

manipulation” (Kreiling, 1984 cited in Baran & Davis 2006, p. 55). As we all know that smoking is jeopardizing to our health but some people don’t actually care about it. Media do know that smoking will jeopardizing people’s health but the media still come out with some websites or advertisement to attract people’s attention and influence people to smoke in order to gain profit from it.

They hide all the disadvantages of smoking and just give out part of the information to the public. They wish to change the public’s mind about smoking. The traditional perception of people towards smoking is those who smoke are quite rude; now, the media has changed the way of portraying the image of a smoker, smokers’ image has been changed into something elegant, cool and glamorous. In the mentioned website, there are a lot of quotations supporting the point that women smoke is very glamorous and elegant (SmokingRachel. om 2005). It brings out a message saying that if you want to be outstanding, elegant, cool and glamorous, you should smoke. Besides the mentioned mass society theory assumptions, the assumption saying that “ the social chaos initiated by media will inevitably be resolved by establishment of a totalitarian social order” (Davis, 1976 cited in Baran & Davis 2006, p. 56). Media have greater power to influence people’s perceptions, therefore the government should restructured the media and control them.

The government should control cigarettes advertisements to be published or broadcast in the media. When the media start to influence people’s perception and brings some social problems, the government should start to do something on it. The government has enough power to control the media,  
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as in Malaysia, the licenses of media organizations are given by the government, if the government finds the content that the media covers is not appropriate, the government has right to censor the information and they can also choose to terminate the license of the media organization.

When the media start causing problem to the society, it is the right time for the government to use its right to control the media in order to solve the social problems. Few days ago, there is a case in Kuching where a school warden punished 200 SMK Bawang Assan school-girls to squat in a pond for an hour (New Straits Times 2007, p. 4). At the same time, another article argue that society should not judge and penalize teachers whose actions in punishing indisciplined students may be seen as excessive in a short period.

As what have been reported in the media, it seems the faults are all belong to the teacher and all the students are innocent. This news article has something related to one of the six assumption of the mass society theory, which the assumption is saying that “ the media are malignant, cancerous force within society and must be purged or totally restructured” (Marcuse, 1969, 1978 cited in Baran and Davis 2006, p. 53). This assumption states that the media is very harmful to the society.

In this case, when the media report this news, they are bias on the students' side. When the readers read this news, they might be influenced by the media; they might be lead to think that it's all about the fault of the teacher. Once the media have reported out the negative or untruth side of certain issues, it affects a large scale of people. Since the media is very harmful, there might be somebody who intentionally insult and bring out negative

news towards certain issues. The media might be used as a tool to attack people this is not a very ethical action.

The last assumption that is going to be covered in this paper is that “ mass media inevitably debase higher forms of culture, bringing about a general decline in civilization (Davis 1976 cited in Baran and Davis 2007, p. 58). This assumption is basically discussing about the changes of culture caused by the media. Recently, there is an article about women’s desire in today’s world (New Straits Times 2007, p. 64). In three or four generations ago, the main role of women is being a housewife, do housework, and taking care of family members world (New Straits Times 2007, p. 4). In today’s world, the role of women has changed into multi-tasking instead of just handling house works world (New Straits Times 2007, p. 64). What had actually changed the mind of women is the media. In some drama series or movies, women’s characteristic is more towards their career, women nowadays have ability of earning money, and they no longer depend on their husband in order to survive. A single-mom can also survive and take care of her child while they are performing well in their career.

In this case, the media plays a role in changing the traditional culture into something new. In conclusion, the six assumption of the mass society theory has state out the influences made by the media, the media is changing people’s mind. The media should be controlled so that the information given out by the media will not cause social problems to the society. Individuals should also identify what they see in the media, so that they will not be negatively influenced by the media, and also not to lose their own culture.