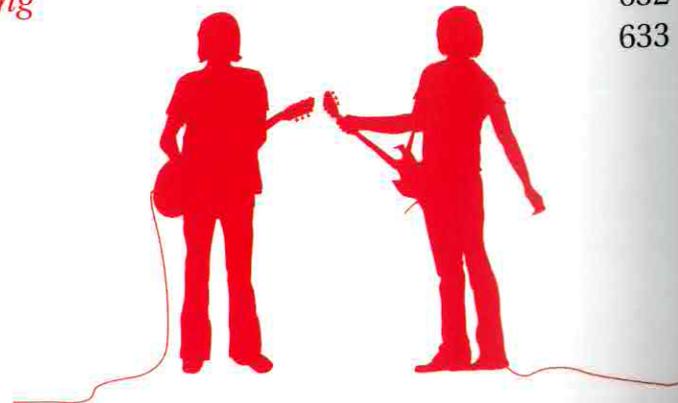


# 15 The Media

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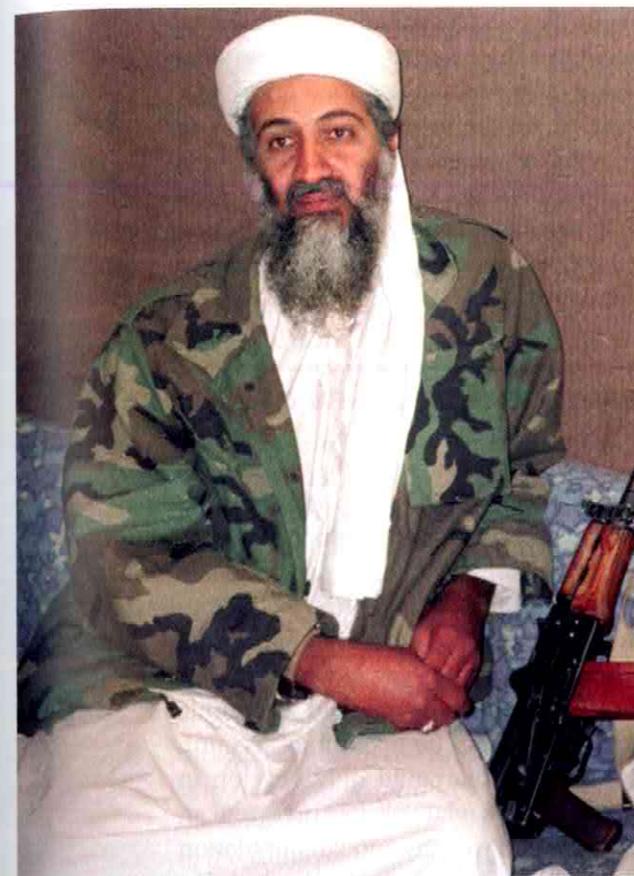




ON 11 SEPTEMBER 2001, terrorists hijacked three planes and used them to attack sites in Washington and New York. The timing of the attacks was such that when a plane crashed into the second of the Twin Towers in New York, around twenty minutes after the first tower had been struck, it is estimated that a global

audience of two billion watched the incident on television in real time. Almost 140 years earlier, in 1865, the actor John Wilkes Booth assassinated US President Abraham Lincoln in a Washington theatre. It took twelve days before the news reached London. The ship carrying the message from the United States was met by a smaller boat off the south coast of Ireland and the news was telegraphed to London from Cork, still beating the ship by three days. (It wasn't until the 1950s that a dedicated trans-oceanic cable existed to carry telegraphs instantly across the Atlantic – although long-wave radio transmission between continents became possible in the early twentieth century.)

In the twenty-first century, communications technology is such that informa-



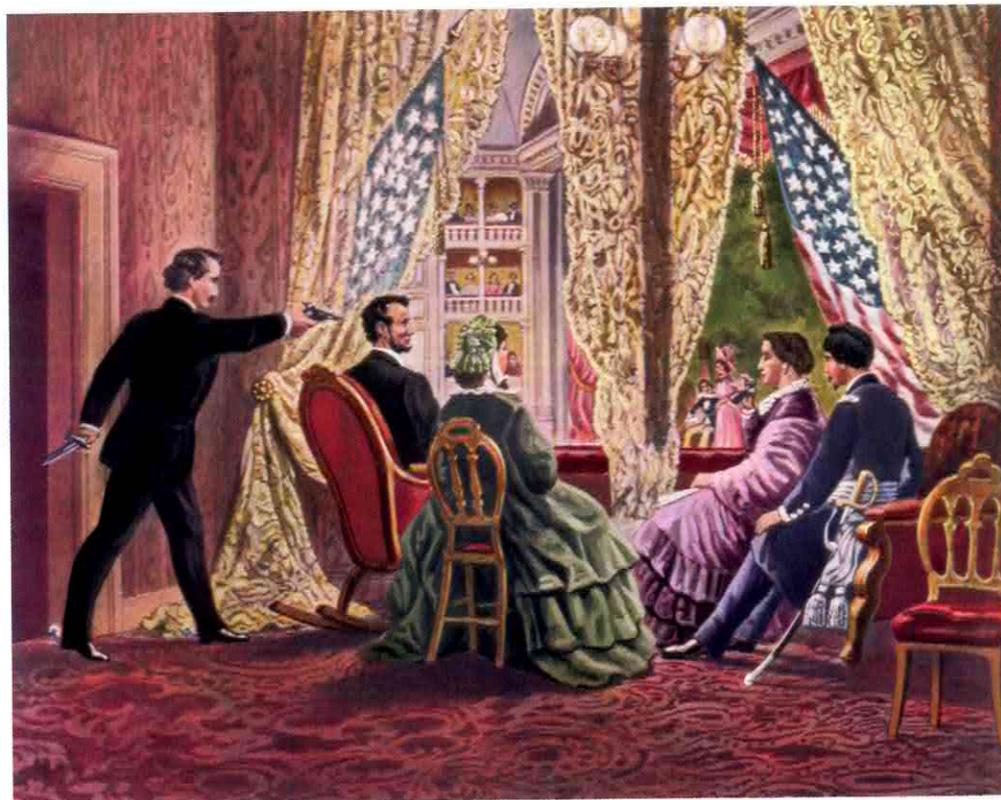
Do you know Osama Bin Laden's face better than that of your next-door neighbour?

tion can be shared instantaneously, and by millions of people simultaneously, almost anywhere around the world. **Communication** – the transfer of information from one individual or group to another, whether in speech or through the mass media of modern times – is crucial to any society. One influential early theorist of communication media was the Canadian author Marshall McLuhan. According to McLuhan, 'the medium is the message'. That is to say, society is influenced much

more by the type of the media than by the content, or the messages, which the media convey. A society in which satellite television plays an important part, for example, is obviously a very different medium from one that relies on the printed word carried aboard an ocean liner. Everyday life is experienced differently in a society in which the television, relaying news instantaneously from one side of the globe to the other, plays an important role to one that relies on horses, ships or the telegraph wire, for example. The electronic media, according to McLuhan, are creating a **global village** – people throughout the world see major events unfold and hence participate in them together. For billions of people around the world the image of Osama Bin Laden, the man blamed for masterminding the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, is more instantly recognizable to them than their next-door neighbour.

We live today in an interconnected world in which people experience the same events from many different places. Thanks to globalization and the power of communications technology, people from Caracas to Cairo are able to receive the same popular music, news, films and television programmes. Twenty-four-hour news channels report on stories as they occur and broadcast coverage of the unfolding events for the rest of the world to see. Films made in Hollywood or Hong Kong reach audiences around the world, while celebrities such as David Beckham and Tiger Woods have become household names on every continent.

For several decades, we have been witnessing a process of convergence in the production, distribution and consumption of information. Whereas at one time



ways of communicating, such as print, television and film, were relatively self-contained spheres, they have now become intertwined to a remarkable degree. The divisions between forms of communication are no longer as dramatic as they once were: television, radio, newspapers and telephones are undergoing profound transformations as a result of advances in technology and the rapid spread of the Internet. While newspapers remain central to our lives, the ways they are organized and deliver their services are changing. Newspapers can be read online, mobile telephone use is exploding, and digital television and satellite broadcasting services allow an unprecedented diversity of choice for viewing audiences. It is the Internet, however, that is at the heart of this communications revolution. With the expansion of technologies such as voice recognition, broadband transmission, web casting and cable links, the Internet threatens to erase the distinctions between traditional forms of media and to become the conduit for the delivery of information, entertainment, advertising and commerce to media audiences.

In this chapter, we'll study the transformations affecting mass media and communications as part of globalization. The **mass media** include a wide variety of forms, including television, newspapers, films, magazines, radio, advertisements, video games and CDs. These are referred to as 'mass' media because they reach mass audiences – audiences comprised of very large numbers of people.

We begin the study of the mass media by considering some of the forms it can take. We discuss older, more traditional forms of media, such as the press, cinema, radio and television, before looking at the

recent development of new forms of media like the Internet. Second, we shall explore some of the key theoretical perspectives on the media. Next, we look at some of the issues surrounding mass media and society, such as bias, the effects of the media and audiences. Last, we look at the development of the mass media in a global age.

## Traditional and new media

An important precursor to the mass media was the invention of the printing press in the mid-fifteenth century, which made the high-speed reproduction of texts possible for the first time. Yet, although technological advances played a crucial part in the development of the mass media, the influence of social, cultural and economic factors must also be taken into account. The mass media could only develop in societies with a relatively free press and an educated and wealthy enough population to take advantage of it. In the last few years, new technologies, such as the Internet, have revolutionized the mass media and wider society too. In the next section we look at the development of new forms of media; first, we examine the rise of the mass media in the UK, by looking at briefly at the press, film, radio and television.

### Traditional media

#### *The press*

The development of the press in Britain during the nineteenth century occurred at a time of political and social unrest. The government exerted its control over the emerging newspaper industry through strict laws on libel and sedition, which

prevented political agitation; at the same time, a stamp tax was imposed to ensure that newspapers were only affordable by the well-off. The stamp tax had unintended consequences, as illegal and inexpensive pamphlets emerged, spreading radical views amongst the newly industrial working class. The biggest of these pamphlets, such as William Cobbett's weekly *Political Register*, outsold the official, 'stamped' press many times over (Hall 1982).

The stamp tax – condemned by its opponents as a 'tax on knowledge' – was finally repealed in 1855 after a series of reductions, leading many writers to hail a golden era of British journalism marked by a 'transition from official to popular control' (Koss 1973). An alternative view was put forward by James Curran and Jean Seaton challenged this view in their historical account of the British press, *Power Without Responsibility* (2003). They saw the repeal of the stamp tax as an attempt to break the popularity of the radical press and to boost the sales of more 'respectable' newspapers. For Curran and Seaton the repeal of the stamp tax did not introduce a new era of press freedom, but a time of repression and ideological control, this time by market forces rather than government. (The issue of media control is discussed below, pp. 615–20.)

The newspaper was a fundamentally important development in the history of modern media, because it packaged many different types of information in a limited and easily reproducible format. Newspapers contained in a single package information on current affairs, entertainment and consumer goods. The cheap daily press was pioneered in the United States.

The one-cent daily paper was originally established in New York and then copied in other major eastern US cities. By the early 1900s there were city or regional newspapers covering most of the American states; in contrast to the smaller countries of Europe, national newspapers did not develop. The invention of cheap newsprint was the key to the mass diffusion of newspapers from the late nineteenth century onwards.

Curran and Seaton have noted that extra revenue from advertising enabled the cover prices to fall dramatically during this period, making the newspaper affordable for all. They also argue that advertising undermined the radical press as advertisers tended to place announcements in papers to which they were politically sympathetic, and to select papers with a smaller circulation and a wealthy readership, rather than radical papers with a higher circulation which sold to readers who would be unlikely to afford the product advertised (Curran and Seaton 2003).

By the early twentieth century new types of national newspaper had emerged in the UK, such as the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, *Mirror* and the *News of the World*, selling a mixture of news, entertainment and patriotism to a largely working-class readership. *The Times* and *Daily Telegraph* provided more serious news analysis for wealthier readers. Ownership of much of the news media by this stage was concentrated amongst a handful of rich entrepreneurs. By the 1930s Lords Beaverbrook, Camrose, Kemsley and Rothermere owned 50 per cent of British national and local daily papers and 30 per cent of the Sunday papers. Critics have argued that the 'press barons', as they became known,

used their ownership of national newspapers to promote their own political causes and ambitions (Curran and Seaton 2003). (We discuss the issue of media ownership further below: see pp. 599–601.)

For half a century or more, newspapers were the chief way of conveying information quickly and comprehensively to a mass public. Their influence has waned with the rise of radio, cinema and – much more important – television and, increasingly, the Internet. Figures for newspaper readership suggest that the proportion of people who read a national daily paper in Britain has declined since the early 1980s. Among men, the proportion of daily newspaper readers dropped from 76 per cent in 1981 to 60 per cent in 1998–9; readership levels are somewhat lower among women, but a similar drop – from 68 per cent to 51 per cent – has taken place (HMSO 2000).

Online communication might well bite further into newspaper circulation. News information is now available online almost instantaneously and is constantly updated during the course of the day. Many newspapers can also be accessed and read online free of charge.

### Film

The first film to be shown to paying customers was in 1895 in Paris, France, where the Lumière brothers' *Arrival of the Train in La Ciotat Station* caused viewers to flee from their seats as the screen slowly filled with an oncoming steam engine. Whilst the print media in the UK developed slowly over many decades, film and the cinema arrived much faster. The first cinema in the UK opened in 1896 and by 1914 there were more than five hundred in London alone. Cinema tickets could be

afforded by all classes and the decline in working hours and rise in unemployment in the late 1920s meant the cinema-goers soon formed a mass audience.

Audience demands were soon leading cinemas to screen two new programmes a week, each consisting of two films, a B-movie and the main feature. The demand for new films led studios to churn out productions to tight schedules. These films tended to be formulaic and created by bureaucratic organizations with a high degree of specialization and division of labour.

Bureaucracy is further discussed in chapter 16, 'Organizations and Networks', pp. 638–46.)

As the industry became more commercialized a 'star system' emerged, with studios encouraging interest in the personal lives of actors like Mary Pickford and Rudolf Valentino, whose appearance in a film would ensure a box-office hit.

By 1925, 95 per cent of the films shown in the UK were American. Cinemas were increasingly controlled by the American studios which owned the distribution rights to films. The studios could oblige cinemas to bulk-buy future productions, effectively freezing out competitors. As with the print media, ownership had become largely concentrated amongst a few large corporations. The American production of the films raises questions about cultural imperialism and the mass media, which we return to below (see pp. 626–30).

### Radio and television

As audiences, we interact differently with the radio and television from how we do with the cinema. Radio and television



Paul Julius Reuter initiated a prototype news service in Paris in 1849, using carrier pigeons as well as the electric telegraph in his network. By 1923, the company he founded, Reuters, was transmitting news by radio.

enters the household in a way that the cinema cannot. Neither do these media demand the attention that film does. Listening to the radio, in particular, is com-

bined with other activities in the everyday lives of its audience – most radio is listened to in the morning as part of the ritual of preparation for the day. Television and radio also have an immediacy which film does not: they can report events, as they did the terrorist attacks in the USA in September 2001, from almost anywhere in the world to a mass audience as they happen.

In the UK, radio was quickly taken under the control of a public monopoly, which by 1926 had become known as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). Radio provided the organizational model for television broadcasting in the UK, and the BBC remains a public organization to this day, funded by licence fees charged to every household that owns a television set. For some years the BBC was the only organization permitted to broadcast either radio or television programmes in the UK. This policy was relaxed with the introduction of commercial television in the 1950s – dependent on advertising for its revenue, rather than the licence fee – and later a host of commercial radio stations.

The first Director-General of the BBC, John Reith (later Lord Reith), a strict Presbyterian Christian, imposed his values rigidly on the organization. To Reith the purpose of the BBC was to 'inform, educate and entertain'; it could be added, in that order. As the historian A. J. P. Taylor has written, Reith used 'the brute force of monopoly to stamp Christian morality on the British people' (cited in Curran and Seaton 2003). It was during this period that the distinctive role of the BBC as a public-service broadcaster developed. (The future of public service broadcasting in the UK is discussed further on p. 614.)

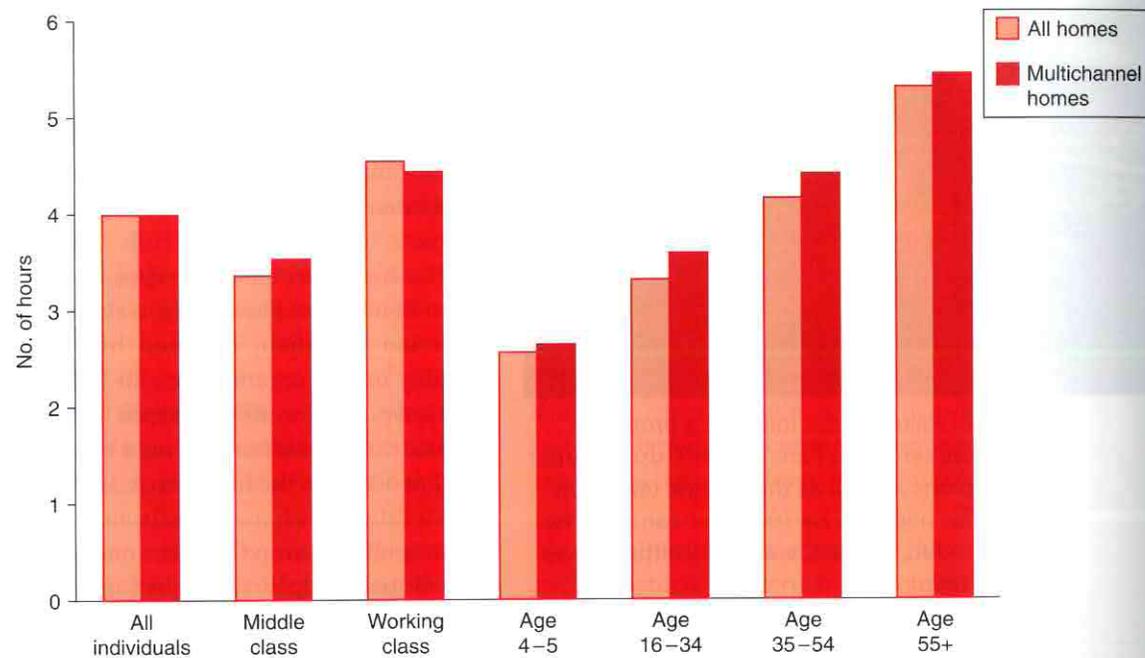
The number of television sets in the UK

and the amount of time that people spend viewing them increased dramatically from the 1950s onwards. Television now dominates the other media. If the current trends in TV watching continue, by the age of eighteen the average child born today will have spent more time watching television than in any other activity except sleep. Virtually every household now possesses a TV set. In the UK, every day around 85 per cent of adults watch television (HMSO 2004), and the average set is switched on for between three and six hours per day. Much the same is true in other West European countries and in the USA. Individuals aged four and over in the UK watch an average of twenty-five hours of television a week. Older people watch

twice as much television as children, perhaps because they are not in school and go to bed later in the evening, and people from lower social classes watch more than those from the top three social classes (see figure 15.1).

#### Television and social life

Several media theorists have been highly sceptical about the effects that a seemingly ever-increasing diet of television has had on the population: two well-known accounts have been provided by Robert Putnam in his recent works on social capital and Neil Postman (1931–2003) in his tellingly titled book, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (1985).



**Figure 15.1** Number of hours of television viewed per household per day, by age and social class, January–March 2003

Source: Adapted from Ofcom (2003), p. 32

To Postman, television presents serious issues as entertainment because, in his phrase, 'the form excludes the content'. By this, he means that television as 'the form' is a medium that is incapable of sustaining serious 'content'. For Postman, rational argument is best carried on in the form of the printed word, which is capable of sustaining complex and serious content. He harks back to the nineteenth century as an 'age of reason', when the written word was dominant. Postman's argument contains some similarities with Marshall McLuhan's claim that 'the medium is the message' (see p. 585), although Postman is much more sceptical than McLuhan about the benefits of electronic media. To Postman, the medium of print creates a rational population, whereas the medium of television creates an entertained one. In a society dominated by the television, news, education and politics are all reduced to entertainment, so that we are, as the title of his book indicates, doing nothing more than 'amusing ourselves to death'.

Although Postman's book is fiercely argued, it has been criticized as being based on impression rather than empirical research. This criticism cannot be levelled at the work of the American political theorist Robert Putman.

Putnam's thesis on the decline of 'social capital' is examined in more detail in chapter 16, 'Organizations and Networks', pp. 675–9.

By **social capital**, as we have seen, Putnam is referring to useful social networks, a sense of mutual obligation and trustworthiness, an understanding of the norms that govern effective behaviour and, in general, other social resources that enable

people to act effectively. Putnam's account, put forward in his book *Bowling Alone* (2000) and elsewhere, is based on research in the United States, where he finds significant decline in social capital over the last few decades. Putnam (1996) suggests a culprit for that decline: television.

Putnam points out that in 1950, around the time measures of social capital peaked, barely 10 per cent of Americans had a television set in their homes; by 1959, this figure had risen to 90 per cent. Studies estimate that the average American now watches roughly four hours of TV every day (not including periods when television is merely playing in the background). A conservative estimate of television viewing in the USA means that this one activity now absorbs around 40 per cent of the average American's free time. Putnam notes that this massive change in the way Americans spend their lives coincided precisely with the years of declining social capital.

Putnam argues that the link between mass television watching and the erosion of social capital is not merely circumstantial. Taking other facts into consideration, such as education, age and gender, TV viewing is strongly and negatively related to social trust and group membership. Using the same criteria, the correlation of newspaper reading to social trust and group membership is positive.

One reason Putnam suggests for why TV viewing erodes social capital is the effect of programme content on viewers. For example, studies suggest that heavy watchers of TV are unusually sceptical about the benevolence of other people – by overestimating crime rates for example. Putnam concludes: 'Just as the erosion of the ozone layer was detected only many

years after the proliferation of the chlorofluorocarbons that caused it, so too the erosion of America's social capital became visible only several decades after the underlying process had begun.' Although Putnam warns against nostalgia for the 1950s, he argues that it is time for critical reflection on the effects of technologies on our lives (Putnam 1995).

### New media

In his book *Being Digital* (1995), the founder of the media laboratory at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Nicholas Negroponte, analyses the profound importance of digital data in current communications technologies. Any piece of information, including pictures, moving images and sounds, can be translated through a binary system into 'bits'. A bit is either 1 or 0. For instance, the digital representation of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, is 1, 10, 11, 100, 101, etc. Digitization – and speed – is at the origin of the development of multimedia: what used to be different media needing different technologies (such as visuals and sound) can now be combined on a single medium (DVD and PCs, etc.). In recent years the processing power of computers has doubled every eighteen months. This means, for example, that it is now possible to watch films and listen to music via the Internet. Digitization also permits the development of interactive media, allowing individuals actively to participate in, or structure, what they see or hear. In this section we examine the profound impact that digitization has had on the media.

#### Digital television

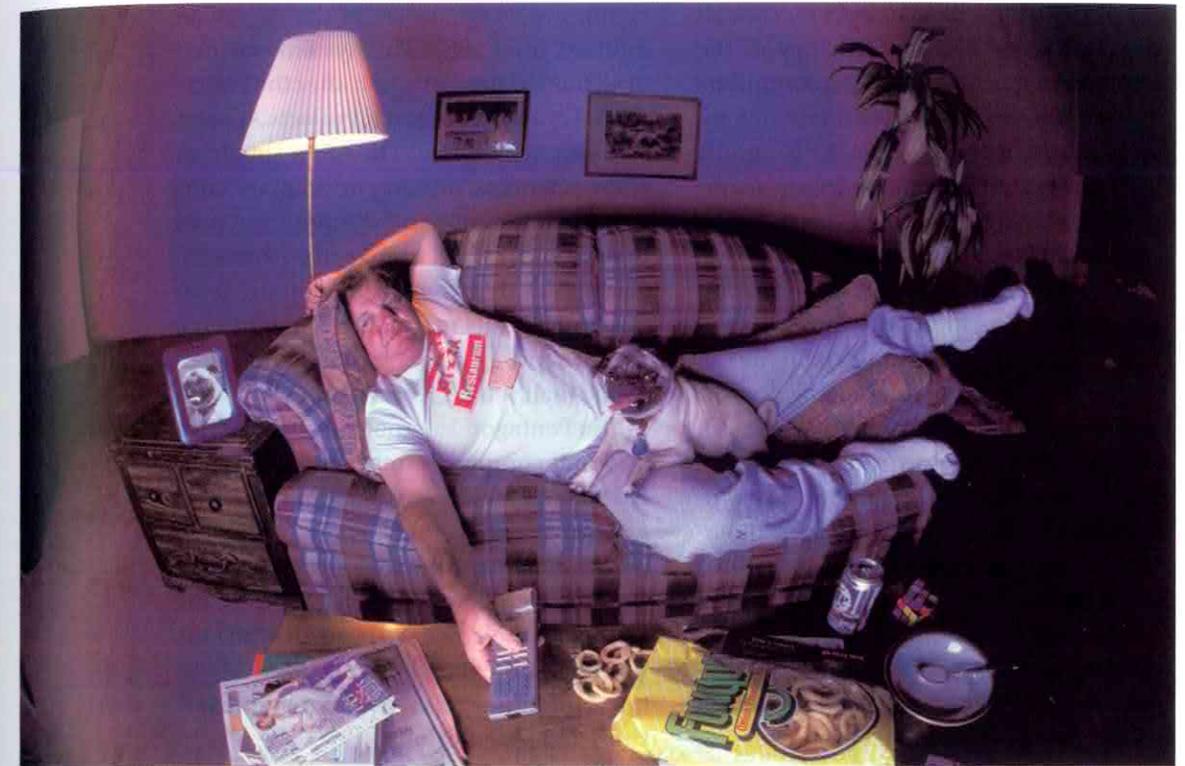
Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, television broadcasting technol-

ogy has been undergoing a revolution, with the transfer of programme transmission from analogue to digital. Analogue TV is the 'old' system of broadcasting that has been used to transmit signals to television sets around the country since the 1940s. It converts sound and pictures into waves, which are transmitted through the air and picked up by the aerial on the roof of the house or on top of the television.

Digital TV works by transforming pictures and sound into information that is understood by a computer. Digital transmissions are received in three ways: through the TV aerial and a decoder (often a set-top box), via a satellite dish or via cable. The television acts like a computer and converts this information back into pictures and sound. Broadcasters and service providers argue that digital television not only means more channels, but also a better quality of sound and pictures and additional services. Digital TV offers the possibility of, for instance, interactive television, the Internet, home shopping and home banking. The arrival of digital TV has also created the possibility of single units that merge the personal computer with the television, although these are not yet widely in use.

In the UK, the government hopes that all viewers will have transferred from analogue to digital television by 2012, when the transmission of television on analogue frequencies is expected to stop. All transmissions from then on will be digital. By 2004, one-third of UK households had already switched to digital television.

The number of television channels available to British audiences has been increasing as a result of advances in satellite, cable and digital technology. In 2003, one service provider, Sky, offered a



Digital and satellite television gives viewers a seemingly endless choice of viewing.

monthly subscription package that gave the viewer a choice of 187 channels. The introduction of digital television on to the UK commercial market in 1998 greatly increased the proportion of viewers subscribing to pay television. In 2003, 26 per cent of British households subscribed to satellite television, while 9 per cent subscribed to cable television (Ofcom 2003)

#### The Internet

Although we have concentrated so far on newspapers, film and television, the media cannot be thought of only in those terms. One of the most fundamental aspects of the media concerns the very infrastructure through which information

is communicated and exchanged. Some important technological advances during the second half of the twentieth century have completely transformed the face of **telecommunications** – the communication of information, sounds or images at a distance through a technological medium.

New communications technologies stand, for example, behind profound changes in the world's money systems and stock markets. Money is no longer gold, or the cash in your pocket. More and more, money has become electronic, stored in computers in the world's banks. The value of whatever cash you do happen to have in your pocket is determined by the activities of traders on electronically linked money

markets. Such markets have been created only over the last few decades: they are the product of a marriage between computers and satellite communication technology. 'Technology', it has been said, 'is rapidly turning the stock exchange into a seamless global market, open 24 hours a day' (Gibbons 1990).

Four technological trends have contributed to these developments: first, the constant improvement in the capabilities of computers, together with declining costs; second, digitization of data (discussed in relation to television on pp. 494–5), making possible the integration of computer and telecommunications technologies; third, satellite communications development; and fourth, fibre optics, which allow many different messages to travel down a single small cable. The dramatic communications explosion of recent years shows no signs of slowing down.

### The origins of the Internet

By the early 1990s, it was becoming clear that the future lay not with the individual personal computer (PC) but with a global system of interconnected computers – the **Internet**. Although many computer users may not have realized it at the time, the PC was quickly to become little more than a point of access to events happening elsewhere – events happening on a network stretching across the planet, a network that is not owned by any individual or company.

The potential of the Internet for the growth of international activism is explored in chapter 20, 'Politics, Government and Terrorism', pp. 870–1.

The Internet originated during the Cold War period that preceded 1989. The 'Net' developed out of a system used in the Pen-

tagon, the headquarters of the American military, from 1969. This system was first of all named the ARPA net, after the Pentagon's Advanced Research Projects Agency. The aim was limited. The ARPA sought to allow scientists working on military contracts in different parts of America to pool their resources and to share the expensive equipment they were using. Almost as an afterthought, its originators thought up a way of sending messages too – thus electronic mail, 'email', was born.

The Pentagon Internet consisted of five hundred computers until the early 1980s, all located in military laboratories and university computer science departments. Other people in universities then started catching on, and began using the system for their own purposes. By 1987 the Internet had expanded to include 28,000 host computers, at many different universities and research labs.

The spread of commercial Internet service providers (ISPs) that offer dial-up, and later broadband, access through modems has fuelled the growing proportion of households with online capabilities. Online services, electronic bulletin boards, chat-rooms and software libraries were put onto the net by a bewildering variety of people, initially mainly situated in the United States, but now all over the world. Corporations also got in on the act. In 1994 companies overtook universities as the dominant users of the network.

The best-known use of the Internet is the World Wide Web (www). Indeed, like a cuckoo in a nest, it threatens to take over its host. The web is in effect a global multimedia library. It was invented by a software engineer at a Swiss physics lab in 1990; the software that popularized it across the world was written by an under-

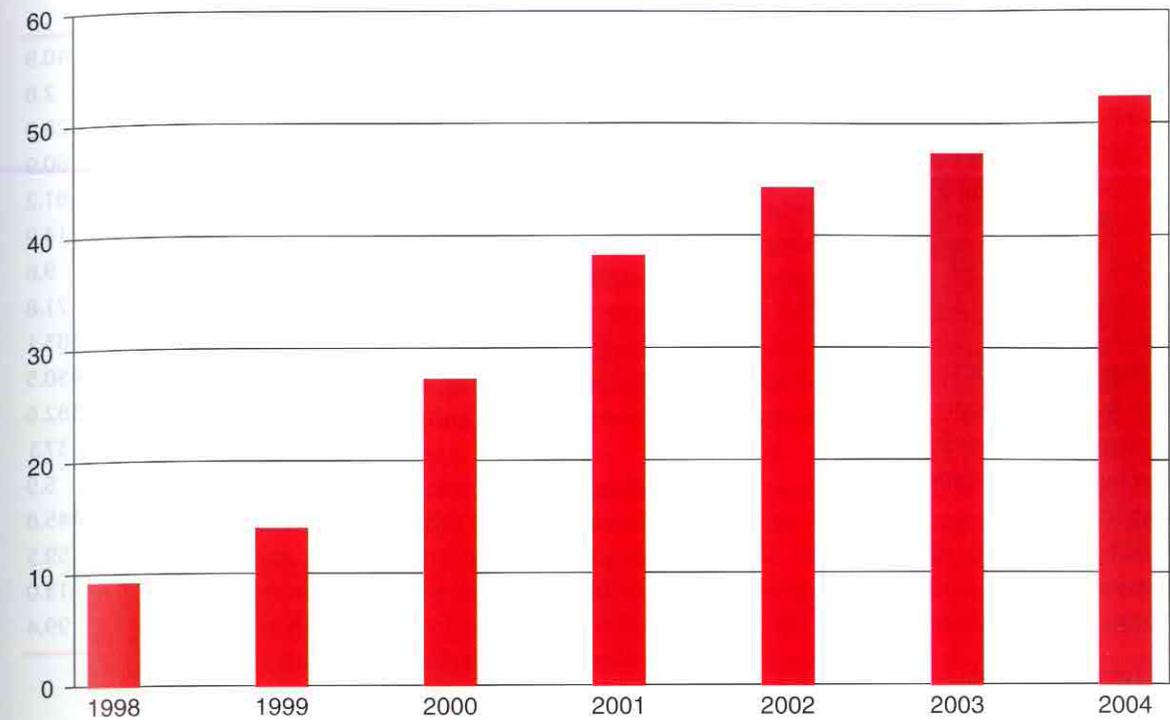


Figure 15.2 Households in the UK with home Internet access, 1998–2004 (%)

Source: National Statistics Online (2004)

graduate at the University of Illinois. Users generally navigate the web with the help of an Internet 'browser' – a software program that allows individuals to search for information, locate particular sites or web pages, and mark those pages for future reference. Through the web, it is possible to download a wide variety of documents and programs, from government policy papers to anti-virus software to computer games. As websites have grown in sophistication, they have become a feast for the senses. Many are adorned with intricate graphics and photographs, or contain video and audio files. The web also serves as the main interface for 'e-commerce' – business transactions conducted online.

With the spread of home-based personal computers access to the Internet in the UK has grown considerably in recent years. By the second quarter of 2004, 52 per cent of households in the UK (12.8 million) could access the Internet from home, compared with just 9 per cent (2.2 million) in the same quarter of 1998 – see figure 15.2.

According to a survey by the National Office of Statistics, the most common use of the Internet among UK adults who had used it during the previous three months was email (85 per cent) and finding information about goods or services (82 per cent). The most frequent place of access was the person's own home (82 per cent), followed by their workplace (42 per cent).

**Table 15.1 Internet users around the world: per 1,000 people (2002)**

All developing countries	40.9
Least developed countries	2.8
Arab States	28.0
East Asia and the Pacific	60.9
Latin America and the Caribbean	81.2
South Asia	14.9
Sub-Saharan Africa	9.6
Central and Eastern Europe and the CIS	71.8
OECD	383.1
High-income OECD	450.5
High human development	382.6
Medium human development	37.3
Low human development	5.9
High income	445.8
Middle income	59.5
Low income	13.0
World	99.4

Source: UNDP (2004)

In July 2004, 37 per cent of adults had never used the Internet (HMSO 2004).

How many people are actually connected to the Internet globally is unknown, but the United Nations estimates that by 2000 around 10 per cent of the world's population were Internet users – and that number is rising fast. However, this access to the Internet is highly uneven (see table 15.1). In 2002, although 45 per cent of people in high-income countries, such as those in Western Europe or North America, were classed as Internet users, only around 1.3 per cent of people in low-income countries, which includes much of Africa, were classified as such.

### The impact of the Internet

In a world of quite stunning technological change, no one can be sure what the

future holds. Many see the Internet as exemplifying the new global order emerging at the close of the twentieth century. Exchanges on the Internet take place in cyberspace. **Cyberspace** means the space of interaction formed by the global network of computers that compose the Internet. In cyberspace, we are no longer 'people', but messages on one another's screens. The Internet provides no certainty about other people's identity, whether they are male or female, or where they are. There is a famous cartoon about the Internet, which has a dog sitting in front of a computer. The caption reads: 'The great thing about the Internet is that no one knows you are a dog.'

The spread of the Internet across the globe has raised important questions for sociologists. The Internet is transforming

the contours of daily life – blurring the boundaries between the global and local, presenting new channels for communication and interaction, and allowing more and more everyday tasks to be carried out online. Yet at the same time as it provides exciting new opportunities to explore the social world, the Internet also threatens to undermine human relationships and communities. Although the 'information age' is still in its early stages, many sociologists are already debating the complex implications of the Internet for late modern societies.

Opinions on the effects of the Internet on social interaction fall into two broad categories. On the one hand are those observers who see the online world as fostering new forms of electronic relationship that either enhance or supplement existing face-to-face interactions. While travelling or working abroad, individuals can use the Internet to communicate regularly with friends and relatives at home. Distance and separation become more tolerable. The Internet also allows the formation of new types of relationship: 'anonymous' online users can meet in 'chat-rooms' and discuss topics of mutual interest. These cyber contacts sometimes evolve into fully fledged electronic friendships or even result in face-to-face meetings. Many Internet users become part of lively online communities that are qualitatively different from those they inhabit in the physical world. Scholars who see the Internet as a positive addition to human interaction argue that it expands and enriches people's social networks.

On the other hand, not everyone takes such an enthusiastic outlook. As people

spend more and more time communicating online and handling their daily tasks in cyberspace, it may be that they spend less time interacting with one another in the physical world. Some sociologists fear that the spread of Internet technology will lead to increased social isolation and atomization. They argue that one effect of increasing Internet access in households is that people are spending less 'quality time' with their families and friends. The Internet is encroaching on domestic life as the lines between work and home are blurred: many employees continue to work at home after hours – checking email or finishing tasks that they were unable to complete during the day. Human contact is reduced, personal relationships suffer, traditional forms of entertainment such as the theatre and books fall by the wayside, and the fabric of social life is weakened.

The Internet also raises challenging questions about personal identity, creates new forms of community and new possibilities for democratic participation. These issues are discussed in chapter 5, 'Social Interaction and Everyday Life', pp. 154–7.

How are we to evaluate these contrasting positions? Most certainly, there are elements of truth on both sides of the debate. The Internet is undoubtedly broadening our horizons and presents unprecedented opportunities for making contact with others. Yet the frenzied pace at which it is expanding also presents challenges and threats to traditional forms of human interaction. Will the Internet radically transform society into a fragmented, impersonal realm where humans rarely venture out of their

homes and lose their ability to communicate? It seems unlikely. About fifty years ago, very similar fears were expressed as television burst onto the media scene. In *The Lonely Crowd* (1961), an influential sociological analysis of American society in the 1950s, David Riesman and his colleagues expressed concern about the effects of TV on family and community life. While some of their fears were well placed, television and the mass media have also enriched the social world in many ways.

Just as with television before it, the Internet has aroused both hopes and the fears. Will we lose our identities in cyberspace? Will computerized technology dominate us, rather than the reverse? Will human beings retreat into an anti-social online world? The answer to each of these questions, fortunately, is almost certainly 'no'. As we saw earlier in the discussion on the 'compulsion of proximity' in chapter 5 (pp. 157–8), people don't use video conferencing if they can get together with others in an ordinary way. Business executives have far more forms of electronic communication available to them than ever before. At the same time, the number of face-to-face business conferences has shot up.

The sociologist Manuel Castells argues that the Internet will continue to grow because it allows networks to flourish. For Castells, networks are the defining organizational structure of our age.

Castells' work is discussed in more detail in chapter 16, 'Organizations and Networks', pp. 671–3.

The inherent flexibility and adaptability of networks give them enormous advantages over older types of rational, hier-

archical organizations. Castells argues that the Internet gives businesses the capability for global coordination of decentralized and highly complex activities. For individuals, the Internet will enable new combinations of work and self-employment, individual expression, collaboration and sociability, and for political activists it will make it possible for networks of individuals to combine and co-operate and spread their message around the world. Playing on McLuhan's idea that 'the medium is the message', Castells argues that now, 'the network is the message' (2001).

## Theoretical perspectives on the media

In this section we examine two of the most influential theoretical approaches to the study of the mass media – functionalism and conflict theory – and introduce some of the important recent contributions to the debate.

### Functionalism

In the mid-twentieth century, functionalist theorists such as Charles Wright and Harold Laswell focused on the ways in which the media function in integrating society (Wright 1960; Laswell 1960).

Functionalist thought was introduced in chapter 1, 'What is Sociology?', pp. 20–2.

Following the media theorist Denis McQuail (2000), several of the most important social functions of the media are reviewed below:

- 1 *Information* The media provides us with a continuous flow of information about the world, from webcams and radio reports that alert us to traffic jams, to rolling weather reports, the stock market and news stories about issues that affect us personally.
- 2 *Correlation* The media explains, and helps us to understand the meaning of the information it gives us. It provides support for established social norms and has an important role in the socialization of children. (Socialization is discussed further in chapter 6.)
- 3 *Continuity* The media has a function in expressing the dominant culture, recognizing new social developments and forging common values.
- 4 *Entertainment* The media provides amusement, diversion and reduces social tension.
- 5 *Mobilization* To encourage economic development, work, religion or support in times of war, the media can campaign to mobilize society to meet these objectives.

In recent decades functionalist theories of the media have fallen into decline. In particular, they were criticized for viewing the audience as passive recipients rather than active interpreters of a media message. (More recent and sophisticated accounts of audience response are discussed below, pp. 608–10.) Furthermore, functionalism has been dismissed for doing nothing more than describing the media, rather than explaining it. As functionalist theories of the media declined in popularity, other forms of analysis came to the fore, in particular conflict approaches influenced by Marxism.

## Conflict theories

In Europe, conflict approaches to the mass media have been popular. Below, we look at two of the most important theories of the media from a broadly Marxist standpoint: the political economy approach and the cultural industry approach. Other approaches that have been influential within this framework include the work of the Glasgow Media Group (which we examine on pp. 606–8).

### Political economy approaches

Political economy approaches view the media as an industry, and examine the way in which the major means of communication have come to be owned by private interests. The ownership of the media has often been concentrated in the hands of a few wealthy media magnates – the dominance of the press barons in the pre-war British press (discussed on pp. 587–8) provides one example. In the global age, the ownership of the media crosses national borders. Below, we profile the Australian-born media mogul Rupert Murdoch, the owner of Sky and other media institutions (pp. 627–8).

Advocates of a political economy view argue that economic interests work to exclude those voices that lack economic power. Moreover, the voices that do survive are those that are least likely to criticize the prevailing distribution of wealth (Golding and Murdock 1997). This view was famously advanced by the American radical Noam Chomsky, in *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievement of Propaganda* (1991). Chomsky is highly critical of the dominance of large corporations over the American and global media. For Chomsky, their dominance



Rupert Murdoch's company, News Corporation, operates on six continents. Its holdings include the *News of the World*, the *Sun*, part of Twentieth Century Fox, HarperCollins and Sky – amongst many other major media.

results in the tight control of information given to the public. During the Cold War, these corporations controlled information to create a climate of fear of the Soviet Union. Since the collapse of the USSR in 1991, Chomsky argues that the corporately owned media have created new fears, such as global terrorism, and that these fears have prevented real issues, such as the unaccountability of corporations or the lack of democracy in the USA, from being discussed.

### The cultural industry

Members of the Frankfurt School, such as Theodore Adorno (1903–69), were highly critical of the effect of mass media on the

mass population. The Frankfurt School (established in the 1920s) consisted of a loose group of theorists inspired by Marx who nevertheless argued that Marx's views needed radical revision. Among other things, they held that Marx had not given enough attention to the influence of culture in modern capitalist society.

Members of the Frankfurt School argued that leisure time had been industrialized. They made an extensive study of what they called the 'culture industry', meaning the entertainment industries of film, TV, popular music, radio, newspapers and magazines (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002). They argued that the pro-

duction of culture had become just as standardized and dominated by the desire for profit as other industries. In a mass society, the leisure industry was used to induce appropriate values amongst the public: leisure was no longer a break from work, but a preparation for it.

Members of the Frankfurt School argued that the spread of the culture industry, with its undemanding and standardized products, undermined the capacity of individuals for critical and independent thought. Art disappears, swamped by commercialization – 'Mozart's Greatest Hits' – and culture is replaced by entertainment. As Lazarsfeld and Merton commented on the USA in the 1950s: 'Economic power seems to have reduced direct exploitation and to have turned to a subtler type of psychological exploitation' (cited in Curran and Seaton 2003).

### Recent theories

#### *Jürgen Habermas: the public sphere*

The German philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas is linked to the Frankfurt School of social thought. Habermas took up some of these themes initiated by the Frankfurt School, but developed them in a different way. He has analysed the evolution of the media from the early eighteenth century up to the present day, tracing the emergence – and subsequent decay – of the 'public sphere' (1989). The **public sphere** is an arena of public debate in which issues of general concern can be discussed and opinions formed.

According to Habermas, the public sphere developed first in the salons and coffee houses of London, Paris and other European cities (one of these salons is

depicted in chapter 1 on p. 6). People used to meet to discuss issues of the moment. Political debate became a matter of particular importance. Although only small numbers of the population were involved, Habermas argues that the salons were vital to the early development of democracy, for they introduced the idea of resolving political problems through public discussion. The public sphere – at least in principle – involves individuals coming together as equals in a forum for public debate.

However, the promise offered by the early development of the public sphere, Habermas concluded, has not been fully realized. Democratic debate in modern societies is stifled by the development of the culture industry. The spread of mass media and mass entertainment causes the public sphere to become largely a sham. Politics is stage-managed in Parliament and the media, while commercial interests triumph over those of the public. 'Public opinion' is not formed through open, rational discussion, but through manipulation and control – as, for example, in advertising.

Habermas's writing is discussed in more detail in chapter 4, 'Theoretical Thinking in Sociology', pp. 118–19.

#### *Jean Baudrillard: the world of hyperreality*

One of the most influential current theorists of the media is the postmodernist French author Jean Baudrillard, whose work has been strongly influenced by the ideas of McLuhan, who was discussed earlier in this chapter (p. 585). Baudrillard regards the impact of modern mass media as being quite different from, and very much more profound than, that of any

technology. The coming of the mass media, particularly electronic media such as television, has transformed the very nature of our lives. TV does not just 'represent' the world to us; it increasingly defines what the world in which we live actually is.

Consider as an example the trial of O. J. Simpson, a celebrated court case that unfolded in Los Angeles in 1994–5. Simpson originally became famous as an American football star, but later became known around the world as a result of appearing in several popular films, including the *Naked Gun* series. He was accused of the murder of his wife Nicole, and after a very long trial was acquitted.

The case became compulsive TV viewing for 95 million Americans, who watched Simpson evade arrest as his car sped along a California highway for sixty miles. Not only was his arrest televised, his trial was also broadcast live on US television, and watched around the globe, including in Britain. In America, six television channels showed continuous coverage of the trial. More than 90 per cent of the US television audience claimed to have watched the trial, and 142 million people heard the 'not guilty' verdict delivered on 3 October 1995. More than 2,000 reporters covered the trial, and more than 80 books have been written about it.

In media terms, it was the trial of the century. The trial was not confined to the courtroom; it was also a televisual event linking millions of viewers and commentators in the media. It is an illustration of what Baudrillard calls 'hyperreality'. There is no longer a 'reality' (the events in the courtroom) which television allows us to see; the 'reality' is actually the string of images on the TV screens of the world, which defined the trial as a global event.

Just before the outbreak of hostilities in the first Gulf War in 1991, Baudrillard wrote a newspaper article entitled 'The Gulf War cannot happen'. When war was declared and a bloody conflict took place, it might seem obvious that Baudrillard had been wrong. Not a bit of it. After the end of the war, Baudrillard wrote a second article: 'The Gulf War did not happen'. What did he mean? He meant that the war was not like other wars that have happened in history. It was a war of the media age, a televisual spectacle, in which, along with other viewers throughout the world, George Bush Senior and former President of Iraq Saddam Hussein watched the coverage by CNN to see what was actually 'happening'.

Baudrillard argues that, in an age where the mass media are everywhere, in effect a new reality – hyperreality – is created, composed of the intermingling of people's behaviour and media images. The world of hyperreality is constructed of **simulacra** – images which only get their meaning from other images and hence have no grounding in an 'external reality'. A famous series of advertisements for Silk Cut cigarettes, for example, didn't refer to the cigarettes at all, but only to previous ads which had appeared in a long series. No political leader today can win an election who doesn't appear constantly on television: the TV image of the leader is the 'person' most viewers know.

#### *John Thompson: the media and modern society*

Drawing in some part on the writings of Habermas, John Thompson has analysed the relation between the media and the development of industrial societies (1990, 1995). From early forms of print



Most of what we know about politicians comes from the television, or what we read in the newspapers.

through to electronic communication, Thompson argues, the media have played a central role in the development of modern institutions. The main founders of sociology, including Marx, Weber and Durkheim, Thompson believes, gave too little attention to the role of media in shaping even the early development of modern society.

Sympathetic to some of the ideas of Habermas, Thompson is also critical of him, as he is of the Frankfurt School and of Baudrillard. The Frankfurt School's attitude to the culture industry was too negative. The modern mass media, Thompson thinks, do not deny us the possibility of

critical thought; in fact, they provide us with many forms of information to which we couldn't have had access before. In common with the Frankfurt School, Habermas treats us too much as the passive recipients of media messages. In Thompson's words:

Media messages are commonly discussed by individuals in the course of reception and subsequent to it. . . . [They] are transformed through an ongoing process of telling and retelling, interpretation and reinterpretation, commentary, laughter and criticism. . . . By taking hold of messages and routinely incorporating them into our lives . . . we are constantly shaping and



reshaping our skills and stocks of knowledge, testing our feelings and tastes, and expanding the horizons of our experience. (1995: 42-3)

Thompson's theory of the media depends on a distinction between three types of interaction (see table 15.2). *Face-to-face interaction*, such as people talking at a party, is rich in clues used by individuals to make sense of what others say (see chapter 5, 'Social Interaction and Everyday Life'). *Mediated interaction* involves the use of a media technology – paper, electrical connections, electronic impulses. Characteristic of mediated interaction is that it is stretched out in time and space – it goes well beyond the contexts of ordinary face-to-face interaction. Mediated interaction takes place

between individuals in a direct way – for instance, two people talking on the telephone – but there isn't an opportunity for the same variety of clues.

A third type of interaction is *mediated quasi-interaction*. This refers to the sort of social relations created by the mass media. Such interaction is stretched across time and space, but it doesn't link individuals directly: hence the term 'quasi-interaction'. The two previous types are 'dialogical': individuals communicate in a direct way. Mediated quasi-interaction is 'monological': a TV programme, for example, is a one-way form of communication. People watching the programme may discuss it, and perhaps address some remarks to the TV set – but, of course, it doesn't answer back.

Table 15.2 Types of interaction

Interactional characteristics	Face-to-face interaction	Mediated interaction	Mediated quasi-interaction
Space-time constitution	Context of co-presence; shared spatial-temporal reference system	Separation of contexts; extended availability in time and space	Separation of contexts; extended availability in time and space
Range of symbolic cues	Multiplicity of symbolic cues	Narrowing of the range of symbolic cues	Narrowing of the range of symbolic cues
Action orientation	Oriented towards specific others	Oriented towards specific others	Oriented towards an indefinite range of potential recipients
Dialogical/monological	Dialogical	Dialogical	Monological

Source: Thompson (1995), p. 465

Thompson's point is not that the third type comes to dominate the other two – essentially the view taken by Baudrillard. Rather, all three types intermingle in our lives today. The mass media, Thompson suggests, change the balance between the public and the private in our lives, bringing more into the public domain than before, and often leading to debate and controversy.

### Ideology and the media

The study of the media is closely related to the impact of *ideology* in society. **Ideology** refers to the influence of ideas on people's beliefs and actions. The concept has been widely used in media studies, as well as in other areas of sociology, but it has also long been controversial. The word was first coined by a French writer, Destutt de Tracy, in the late 1700s. He used it to mean a 'science of ideas'.

In the hands of later authors, however, the term became used in a more critical way. Marx, for example, regarded ideology as 'false consciousness'. Powerful groups

are able to control the dominant ideas circulating in a society so as to justify their own position. Thus, according to Marx, religion is often ideological: it teaches the poor to be content with their lot. The social analyst should uncover the distortions of ideology so as to allow the powerless to gain a true perspective on their lives – and take action to improve their conditions of life.

Thompson calls de Tracy's view the *neutral* conception of ideology and Marx's view the *critical* conception of ideology. Neutral conceptions 'characterize phenomena as ideology or ideological without implying that these phenomena are necessarily misleading, illusory or aligned with the interests of any particular group'. Critical notions of ideology 'convey a negative, critical or pejorative sense' and carry with them 'an implicit criticism or condemnation' (1990: 53-4).

Thompson argues that the critical notion is to be preferred, because it links ideology with power. Ideology is about the exercise of symbolic power – how ideas are

used to hide, justify or legitimate the interests of dominant groups in the social order.

In their studies, members of the Glasgow Media Group, discussed below, were in effect analysing ideological aspects of TV news reporting and how it biased covered. They found that news tended to favour the government and management at the expense of the strikers. In general, Thompson believes, mass media – including not only the news but all varieties of programme content and genre – greatly expand the scope of ideology in modern societies. They reach mass audiences and are, in his terms, based on ‘quasi-interaction’ – audiences cannot answer back in a direct way.

### **Bias and the media: the Glasgow University Research Group**

#### **TV news**

Sociological studies of television have given a good deal of attention to its coverage of the news. A substantial proportion of the population no longer reads newspapers; TV news is thus a key source of information about what goes on in the world. Some of the best-known – and most controversial – research studies concerned with television news have been those carried out by the Glasgow University Media Group. Over the last three decades, the group has published a series of works critical of the presentation of the news, including *Bad News*, *More Bad News*, *Really Bad News* and *War and Peace News*. They followed similar research strategies in each of these books, although they altered the focus of their investigations.

*Bad News* (Glasgow Media Group 1976), their first and most influential book, was based on an analysis of TV news broadcasts on the three UK terrestrial channels available at that time between January and June 1975. The objective was to provide a systematic and dispassionate analysis of the content of the news and the ways in which it was presented. *Bad News* concentrated on the portrayal of industrial disputes. The later books concentrated more on political coverage and on the Falklands War of 1982.

The conclusion of *Bad News* was that news about industrial relations was typically presented in a selective and slanted fashion. Terms like ‘trouble’, ‘radical’ and ‘pointless strike’ suggested anti-union views. The effects of strikes, causing disruption for the public, were much more likely to be reported on than their causes. Film material that was used very often made the activities of protesters appear irrational and aggressive. For example, film of strikers stopping people entering a factory would focus on any confrontations that occurred, even if they were very infrequent.

*Bad News* also pointed out that those who construct the news act as ‘gatekeepers’ for what gets on the agenda – in other words, what the public hears about at all. Strikes in which there were active confrontations between workers and management, for instance, might get widely reported. More consequential and long-lasting industrial disputes of a different sort might be largely ignored. The view of news journalists, the Glasgow Media Group suggested, tends to reflect their middle-class backgrounds and supports the views of the dominant groups in society, who inevitably see strikers as dangerous and irresponsible.

The works of the Glasgow Media Group were much discussed in media circles as well as in the academic community. Some news producers accused the researchers of simply exercising their own biases, which they thought lay with the strikers. They pointed out that, while *Bad News* contained a chapter on ‘The trade unions and the media’, there was no chapter on ‘Management and the media’. This should have been discussed, critics of the Glasgow Media Group argued, because news journalists are often accused by management of organizations facing strikes of bias against them, rather than against the strikers.

Academic critics made similar points. Martin Harrison (1985) gained access to transcripts of ITN news broadcasts for the period covered by the original study. On this basis he argued that the five months analysed in the study were not typical. There was an abnormal number of days lost because of industrial action over the period. It would have been impossible for the news to report all of these, and therefore the tendency to focus on the more colourful episodes was understandable.

In Harrison’s view, the Glasgow Media Group was wrong to claim that news broadcasts concentrated too much on the effects of strikes. After all, many more people are normally affected by strikes than take part in them. Sometimes millions of people find their lives disrupted by the actions of just a handful of people. Finally, according to Harrison’s analysis, some of the assertions made by the Media Group were simply false. For example, contrary to what the Group stated, the news did normally name the unions involved in disputes and did say whether or not the strikes were official or unofficial.

In replying to such criticism, members of the Group noted that Harrison’s research had been partly sponsored by ITN, possibly compromising his academic impartiality. The transcripts scrutinized by Harrison were not complete and some passages were included that ITN did not in fact broadcast at all.

In recent years, members of the Glasgow Media Group have carried out a range of further research studies. The latest edition of the *Bad News* series, *Bad News from Israel* (Philo and Berry 2004), examined television news reporting of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The study was carried out over a two-year period and was supported by several senior television news broadcasters and journalists who were involved in panel discussions with members of an 800-person sample audience. As well as looking at the television coverage of the conflict, the authors were interested in how the coverage related to the understanding, beliefs and attitudes of the audience.

The study concluded that the television news coverage of the conflict confused viewers and substantially featured Israeli government views. The study found a bias towards official ‘Israeli perspectives’, particularly on BBC 1, where Israelis were interviewed or reported more than twice as much as Palestinians. In addition, American politicians who supported Israel were often featured. The study also found that the news gave a strong emphasis to Israeli casualties, relative to Palestinians (although two to three times more Palestinians than Israelis died). There were also differences in the language used by journalists to describe Israeli and Palestinian attacks. For example, journalists would often describe Palestinian acts as

'terrorism', but when an Israeli group was reported as trying to bomb a Palestinian school, they were referred to as 'extremists' or 'vigilantes' (Philo and Berry 2004).

*Bad News from Israel* also argued that there was little coverage devoted to the history or origins of the conflict. The great majority of viewers depended on this news as their main source of information. The gaps in their knowledge closely paralleled the 'gaps' in the news. The survey argued that, again, this worked against the Palestinians, by giving the impression that the problems 'started' with Palestinian action (Philo and Berry 2004).

In their earlier volume, *Getting the Message*, the Glasgow Media Group collected together recent research on news broadcasting. The editor of the volume, John Eldridge, points out that the debate provoked by the original work of the Glasgow Media Group still continues (1993). To say what would count as objectivity in news reporting will always be difficult. As against those who say that the idea of objectivity makes no sense (see 'Baudrillard: the world of hyperreality', pp. 601–2 above), Eldridge affirms the importance of continuing to look at media products with a critical eye. Accuracy in news reporting can and must be studied. After all, when the football results are reported, we expect them to be accurate. A simple example like this, Eldridge argues, reminds us that issues of truth are always involved in news reporting.

Yet the point holds that the news is never just a 'description' of what 'actually happened' on a given day or in a given week. The 'news' is a complex construction that regularly influences what it is 'about'. For example, when a politician appears on a news programme and makes

a comment about a controversial issue – say, the state of the economy and what should be done about it – that comment itself becomes 'news' in subsequent programmes.

## Audiences and media effects

The effect that ideological bias has on the audience depends upon the theoretical position one takes over the role of the audience in the mass media. Here, we turn to the question through a brief analysis of audience studies.

### Audience studies

One of the earliest, and the most straightforward, models of audience response is the *hypodermic model*. This compares the media message to a drug injected by syringe. The model is based on the assumption that the audience (patient) passively and directly accepts the message and does not critically engage with it in any way. The hypodermic model also assumes that the message is received and interpreted in more or less the same way by all members of society. The concept of *narcotization*, associated with the Frankfurt School (see pp. 600–1), draws on the hypodermic model. Under this view, the media is seen as 'drugging' the audience, destroying its ability to think critically about the wider world (Marcuse 1964). The hypodermic model is now out of fashion, and was often little more than an unstated assumption in the works of early writers on the mass media. However, the model's assumptions about the media can still be found in the works of contempo-



The hypodermic model assumes that media messages are passively received by viewers. Such ideas are often implicit in arguments about the effects of television on children.

rary writers who are sceptical about the effects of the mass media on modern society.

Critics of the hypodermic model have pointed out that it takes no account of the very different responses that different audiences have to the media, treating them as homogenous and passive. Most theorists now argue that audience responses go through various stages. In their work on audience response, Katz and Lazarsfeld drew on studies of political broadcasts during US presidential elections, and argued that audience response is formed through a *two-step flow*: the first step is when the media reaches the audi-

ence; the second comes when the audience interprets the media through their social interaction with influential people – 'opinion leaders' – who further shape audience response (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955).

Later models assume a more active role for an audience in response to the media. The *gratification model* looks at the ways in which different audiences use the media to meet their own needs (Lull 1990). Audiences may use the media to learn more about the world they live in – finding out about the weather or stock market for example. Others may use the media to help with their relationships, to feel part of

a fictional community (from watching TV soaps, for example), or to get on with friends and colleagues who also watch the same programme. (We discuss soap operas in the box opposite) Critics of this model have argued that it assumes that audience needs already exist, not that they are created by the media.

Later theories of audience response have looked at the ways in which people actively interpret the media. Stuart Hall's account of *reception theory* focuses on the way in which an audience's class and cultural background affects that way in which it makes sense of different media 'texts' – a term that is used to encompass various forms of media from books and newspapers to films and CDs. Some members of an audience may simply accept the preferred reading 'encoded' in a text – such as a news bulletin – by its producer. This preferred reading, Hall argues, is likely to reflect the dominant or mainstream ideology (as the Glasgow Media Group, whose work is discussed above on pp. 606–8, found). However, Hall argues that the understanding of a text also depends on the cultural and class background of the person interpreting it. Other members of an audience may take an 'oppositional' reading of a text, because their social position places them in conflict with the preferred reading. For example, a worker involved in strike action or a member of an ethnic minority is likely to take an oppositional reading of a text such as a news story on industrial or race relations, rather than accept the dominant reading encoded in the text by its producer (Hall 1980).

Following Hall, recent theories have focused on the way in which audiences filter information through their own experience (Halloran 1970). The audience

may link different media 'texts' (programmes or genres, for example) or use one type of media to engage with another – questioning what they are told on the television compared to the newspaper (Fiske 1988). Here the audience has a powerful role, far removed from the hypodermic model. The *interpretative model* views audience response as shaping the media through its engagement or rejection of its output.

### Media effects

The perceived effects of the media are manifold. The media has been blamed for alienation, copy-cat killings, producing apathy amongst the population, reinforcing prejudices and trivializing important issues (Watson 2003). Of course, the extent to which we blame the media for negative effects depends upon the view taken of how active or passive an audience is, as we have seen above. In this section we look at two areas in which the media is said to have a negative effect: violence and pornography.

#### *The media and violence*

The incidence of violence in television programmes is well documented. The most extensive studies have been carried out by Gerbner and his collaborators, who analysed samples of prime-time and weekend day-time television for all the major American networks each year after 1967. The number and frequency of violent acts and episodes of violence were charted for a range of types of programme. Violence is defined in the research as the threat or use of physical force, directed against the self or others, in which physical harm or death is involved. Television

### Genres, audience response and soap operas

A genre created by radio and television came to be called 'soap opera' – now TV's most popular type of programme. Of the most watched TV shows in Britain each week, almost all are soaps – *EastEnders*, *Coronation Street* and many others. Soap operas fall into various different types, or subgenres, at least as represented on British TV. Soaps produced in the UK, like *Coronation Street*, tend to be gritty and down to earth, often concerned with the lives of poorer people. Second, there are American imports, many of which, like *Dallas* or *Dynasty* in the 1980s, portray individuals leading more glamorous lives. A third category is made up of Australian imports, such as *Neighbours*. These tend to be low-budget productions, featuring middle-class homes and lifestyles.

Soaps are like TV as a whole: continuous. Individual stories may come to an end, and different characters appear and disappear, but the soap itself has no ending until it is taken off the air completely. Tension is created between episodes by so-called 'cliff-hangers'. The episode stops abruptly just before some key event happens and the viewer has to wait until the next episode to see how things turn out.

A basic part of the genre of soap opera is that it demands regular viewing on the part of whoever watches it. A single episode makes very little sense. Soap operas presume a history, which the regular viewer knows – he or she becomes familiar with the characters, with their personalities and their life experiences. The threads, which are linked to create such a

history, are above all personal and emotional – soaps for the most part do not look at larger social or economic frameworks, which impinge only from the outside.

Sociologists have put differing views forward as to why soap operas are so popular – and they are popular across the world, not only in Britain or America, but also in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Some think that they provide a means of *escape*, particularly where women (who watch soaps in greater numbers than men) find their own lives dull or oppressive. Such a view is not particularly convincing, though, given that many soaps feature people whose lives are just as problematic. More plausible is the idea that soap operas address universal properties of personal and emotional life. They explore dilemmas anyone may face, and perhaps they even help some viewers to think more creatively about their own lives. The sociologist Dorothy Hobson, in her book *Soap Opera*, has written that soaps work not because they are escapist, but 'because the audience has intimate familiarity with the characters and their lives. Through its characters the soap opera must connect with the experience of its audience, and its content must be stories of the ordinary' (Hobson 2002).

### Questions

- 1 Do you watch soap operas? Explain why or why not from a sociological perspective.
- 2 How do functionalist and conflict theories explain the popularity of soap operas?

drama emerged as highly violent in character: on average, 80 per cent of such programmes contained violence, with a rate of 7.5 violent episodes per hour. Children's programmes showed even higher levels of violence, although killing was less commonly portrayed. Cartoons contained the highest number of violent acts and episodes of any type of television programme (Gerbner 1979, 1980; Gunter 1985).

In what ways, if at all, does the depiction of violence influence the audience? F. S. Anderson collected the findings of sixty-seven studies conducted over the twenty years from 1956 to 1976 investigating the influence of TV violence on tendencies to aggression among children. About three-quarters of the studies claimed to find some such association. In 20 per cent of cases there were no clear-cut results, while

in 3 per cent of the researches the investigators concluded that watching television violence actually decreases aggression (Anderson 1977; Liebert et al. 1982).

The studies Anderson surveyed, however, differ widely in the methods used, the strength of the association supposedly revealed and the definition of 'aggressive behaviour'. In crime dramas featuring violence (and in many children's cartoons) there are underlying themes of justice and retribution. A far higher proportion of miscreants are brought to justice in crime dramas than happens with police investigations in real life, and in cartoons harmful or threatening characters usually tend to get their 'just deserts'. It does not necessarily follow that high levels of the portrayal of violence create directly imitative patterns among those watching, who are perhaps more influenced by the underlying moral themes. In general, research on the effects of television on audiences has tended to treat viewers – children and adults – as passive and undiscriminating in their reactions to what they see.

Although most studies have not found a link between television violence and violence in real life, the issue has remained a controversial one. In the USA, an amendment to the 1996 Telecommunications Act forced almost all televisions made after 1999 to have a built-in 'V-Chip' (the V stands for 'violence'), an electronic device that enables parents to filter violent and sexually explicit material from the programmes their children watch on TV. The television industry was asked to develop a rating system, similar to one used in films, to use with the V-Chip (Signorielli 2003). Studies have found, however, that although parents express strong concerns

about what their children watch on television, few bother to turn on their television's V-chip (Annenberg Center 2003). There was a joke that the parents would be unable to work out how to turn the V-chip on or off without their young son or daughter showing them how.

### *Pornography*

The debate about the effects of pornography has many similarities to discussions about the media effects of violence. Legal regulation of sexually explicit pictures has a long history. In the USA legislation, known as the Comstock laws, was passed in the late nineteenth century, banning sexually explicit material, which it defined as material that would offend the sensibility of a young girl (Grossberg et al. 1998).

From the late 1970s the links between pornography and sexual violence against women began to be increasingly debated, especially amongst feminists. The argument was put forward that pornography objectifies women and users of pornography are more likely than non-users to be sexually violent towards women. The feminist writer Robin Morgan summed this up concisely with the comment: 'Pornography is the theory, and rape the practice' (Morgan 1994).

See chapter 12, 'Sexuality and Gender', pp. 471–2, for more about radical feminists' views.

Sociological research into this area has generally attempted to assess if a causal link exists between the use of pornography and sexual aggression. A report for the American Psychological Association found that, amongst adults, whilst there are no antisocial effects to viewing erotica,

or sexually explicit materials that are not violent or degrading to women, repeated exposure to sexualized violence does desensitize users to the severity of rape and reduce emotional reaction to the depicted victim (Huston et al. 1992). As the expansion of the Internet makes pornographic and violent materials ever more easily available, questions about audience responses and media effects are increasingly important.

## **The control of the media**

### **Political control**

#### *Public broadcasting and the BBC*

In most countries the state has been directly involved with the administration of television broadcasting. In Britain the British Broadcasting Corporation, which initiated the first television programmes ever produced, is a public organization, funded, as we have already seen, by licence fees paid by every household that owns a set. For some years the BBC was the only organization permitted to broadcast either radio or television programmes in Britain, but today, alongside the two terrestrial BBC TV stations, BBC 1 and 2, there exist three terrestrial commercial television channels (ITV, Channel 4 and 5). Only the BBC is funded by the licence fee; the commercial channels rely on revenue generated by advertising. The frequency and duration of advertising is controlled by law, with a maximum of six minutes per hour. These regulations also apply to satellite channels, which became widely available to subscribers in the 1980s. (The future of the BBC is discussed in the box on p. 614.)

In the USA the three leading television organizations are all commercial networks – the American Broadcasting Company (ABC), Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) and the National Broadcasting Company (NBC). Networks are limited by law to owning no more than five licensed stations, which in the case of these three organizations are in the biggest cities. The 'big three' together reach over a quarter of all households through their own stations. Some two hundred affiliated stations are also attached to each network, comprising 90 per cent of the seven hundred or so TV stations in the country. The networks depend for their income on selling advertising time. The National Association of Broadcasters, a private body, lays down guidelines about the proportion of viewing time per hour to be devoted to advertising: 9.5 minutes per hour during 'prime time' and 16 per hour at other periods. TV companies use regularly collected statistics (ratings) of how many people watch specific programmes in setting advertising fees. The ratings also, of course, strongly influence decisions on which programmes to continue to show.

The power of publicly run television stations has been reduced since the advent of multi-channel TV, DVD and video, and the arrival of services such as Sky+ (which combines a digital video recorder and satellite receiver to find and record programmes the viewer has expressed an interest in, effectively creating a personalized channel). In return for a subscription fee or one-off payment for a digital set-top box, today's television watcher can select from a multiplicity of channels and programmes. In such circumstances people

increasingly do their own 'programming', constructing personal viewing schedules rather than depending on the presupplied network scheduling.

Digital, satellite and cable are altering

the nature of television almost everywhere. As these make inroads into the domains of the orthodox terrestrial television channels, it will become yet more difficult for governments to control the

### The future of the BBC

The position of the BBC – like that of public broadcasters in most other countries – is under strain and has been the subject of much controversy. The future of the BBC has become problematic because of the fragmentation of its audience. The development of digital technology has meant that literally hundreds of commercial cable and satellite channels have become available which threaten the dominance of the BBC. From having a monopoly of the British television audience until the launch of commercial television in the mid-1950s the BBC's share of the terrestrial television audience had fallen to around 36 per cent by 2003. As the number of BBC viewers falls, more people have started to question why they have to pay the licence fee – particularly if they do not watch BBC television or listen to BBC radio stations.

During the 1990s the BBC, along with other public monopolies such as the National Health Service, was put under considerable pressure to become more efficient and market-orientated. Sir John Birt, Director-General from 1992 to 1999, introduced an internal market giving programme-makers freedom to buy resources like camera crews from outside the BBC; he also developed the BBC's commercial activities and dramatically cut the costs of programme-making, often through job cuts (Born 2004).

Critics of public monopolies have suggested that this does not go far enough and have pushed for the BBC to be privatized. For example, David Elstein, the former chief executive of Channel 5, argued in a recent report commissioned by the Conservative Party that the BBC should become a subscription service to those who wish to use it and the licence fee should be abolished (2004). So far, the idea of wholesale privatization has been resisted.

Many people believe that it is important for the BBC to stay in public ownership. Yet, as some commentators have noted, the effects of deregulation in the environment in which it operates, as well as financial pressures, have turned the BBC into a commercial system which preserves part of its original public service element. Supporters of the BBC argue that as the television sector is deregulated, the role of the BBC becomes ever more important, particularly in keeping programme standards high, and – now that people over the age of seventy-five get free TV licences – reaching socially excluded portions of the population. As a former Director of Policy and Planning for the BBC commented:

There are real fears that more will mean worse, that competition will fragment audiences and investment across multiple outlets, leading to tabloid values and to a nation divided between those who embrace the new services and those who either cannot afford to or do not wish to do so. The challenge for public policy is to deliver the best of both worlds; to drive growth and to sustain quality. (Currie and Siner 1999)

Despite the fallout from the Hutton Inquiry in 2004 (see box opposite), which caused the resignation of several senior figures in the organization, the government has guaranteed the future of the BBC, at least in the short term. A report from Ofcom, the government's media industry regulator, stressed the importance of the BBC in providing programming that is 'high quality, original, innovative, challenging, engaging and widely available', and have recommended that the licence fee survives until at least 2016 (Ofcom 2003).

content of TV, as they have characteristically done in the past. For example, the reach of Western media seems to have played a part in the circumstances that produced the revolutions of 1989 in Eastern Europe.

For more about the effects of a globalized media, see chapter 20 'Politics, Government and Terrorism', pp. 618–30.

### The Iraq dossier row

To rally support for war, the Prime Minister's office published a dossier of charges against Iraq in September 2002. It claimed, among other things, that Iraq could deploy weapons of mass destruction (WMD) within 45 minutes.

Yet with no WMD used by Iraqi forces in the ensuing war and none found, the dossier's veracity came under suspicion. One of its allegations, which George Bush made part of his 2003 state-of-the-union address, was discredited by intelligence sources. Then, in June 2003, a BBC journalist accused Alistair Campbell, Tony Blair's chief spin-doctor, of having 'sexed up' the dossier against the wishes of Britain's security services (in particular, inserting the '45-minute' claim).

A parliamentary investigation cleared Mr Campbell of this charge (he resigned in August 2003). But the BBC refused to back down, sparking a furious row with the government. This took a tragic turn when a government scientist [Dr David Kelly], who'd been exposed as the main source of the BBC's story, committed suicide. An inquiry into his death, which reported in January 2004, cleared the government of 'sexing up' the dossier and largely – but not wholly – vindicated the scientist's employers, the Defence Ministry. Criticism was instead heaped on the BBC, prompting the resignations of its director-general and chairman of governors.

A related inquiry into intelligence failures, headed by Lord Butler, in July 2004 cleared the government of any deliberate attempt to mislead Parliament. But it did suggest that Mr Blair was prepared to exaggerate what turned out to be fairly thin evidence to bolster the case for a war.

Source: *The Economist* (5 April 2005)

### Anti-monopoly measures

As the authors of *Bad News* pointed out, (see above, pp. 606–8) those who construct the news act as 'gatekeepers' for what gets on the agenda. News stories that are successfully broadcast or published are not always chosen according to some simple criterion of newsworthiness. Journalists are well aware that they must find stories that fit with the agenda of the organization they work for, and these news organizations may have political agendas of their own – they are not just in the business of selling goods but of influencing opinions. For this reason the rise and influence of the media entrepreneurs and the large media companies worries many. The proprietors of such corporations, like Rupert Murdoch (see box on pp. 627–8), make no secret of their political views, which inevitably are a cause of concern to political parties and other groups holding different political positions.

Recognizing this, all countries have provisions that seek to control media ownership. But how tight should these be? And given the global character of media enterprises, can national governments in any case have much hope of controlling them?

The issue of **media regulation** is more complex than might appear at first sight. It seems obvious that it is in the public interest that there should be a diversity of media organizations, since this is likely to ensure that many different groups and political perspectives can be listened to. Yet placing limits on who can own what, and what forms of media technology they can use, might affect the economic prosperity of the media sector. A country that is too restrictive might find itself left behind – the media industries are one of the fastest growing sectors of the modern economy.

Critics of media concentration say that the large media companies wield excessive power. Businesses, on the other hand, argue that if they are subject to regulation they cannot make effective commercial decisions and will lose out in global competition. Moreover, they ask, who is to do the regulating? Who is to regulate the regulators?

One guiding thread of media regulation policy might be the recognition that market dominance by two or three large media companies simultaneously threatens both proper economic competition and democracy – since the media owners are unelected. Existing anti-monopoly legislation can be brought into play here, although it differs widely across Europe and other industrial countries.

Competitiveness means pluralism, or should do – and presumably pluralism is

good for democracy. Yet is pluralism enough? Many point to the USA in arguing that having a plurality of media channels does not guarantee quality and accuracy of content (as Chomsky's criticisms, discussed above, demonstrate). Some see the maintenance of a strong public broadcasting sector as of key importance in blocking the dominance of the large media companies. Yet public broadcasting systems, which in Britain are led by the BBC, create their own problems. In most countries they themselves used to be a monopoly and in many countries were effectively used as a means of government propaganda. The question of who is to regulate the regulators comes up here with particular force. (The issue of government attempts to control the mass media and democratization in China is discussed in the box.)

### Globalization and everyday life: censorship and the media in China

*The contradictory nature of globalization is illustrated clearly in China, a country that is undergoing rapid cultural and economic transformation under the watchful eye of the Chinese Communist Party.*

*In the 1980s, the Chinese government oversaw the expansion of a national television system and encouraged the purchase of televisions by its citizens. The government saw television broadcasting as a means of uniting the country and promoting party authority. Television, however, can be a volatile medium. Not only is it not possible for television broadcasting to be tightly controlled in an age of satellite based channels, but Chinese audiences have demonstrated their willingness to interpret TV content in ways that run contrary to government intentions (Lull 1997).*

*In interviews with a hundred Chinese families, James Lull found that Chinese audiences, like other populations under Communist regimes, were 'masters of interpretation, reading between the lines in*

*order to pick up the less obvious messages'. In his interviews, Lull noted that his respondents would not only describe what they watched, but how they watched it: 'Because viewers know that the government often bends and exaggerates its reports, they become skilled at imagining the true situation. What is presented, what is left out, what is given priority, how things are said – all these modes are noticed and interpreted sensitively.'*

*Lull concluded that many of the messages seen by Chinese audiences on TV – primarily in imported films and commercials – run contrary to the way of life and opportunities available in their own society. Seeing television content emphasizing individuality and the consumer society, many Chinese viewers felt their own options were constrained in real life. Television conveyed to Chinese audiences that other social systems seemed to function more smoothly and offer greater freedom than their own.*

*More recently, the Internet and other new communication technologies have posed fresh*

*challenges for the Chinese government. While some people contend that these new media will help people circumvent state controls, others maintain that the state censors are likely to keep pace with technological advances.*

### 'The Great Firewall of China'

The Chinese effort to censor the Internet is a feat of technology, legislation and manpower. According to the BBC, which is almost completely blocked within the 'great firewall of China' (as it is known among techies), 50,000 different Chinese authorities 'do nothing but monitor traffic on the internet'. No single law exists to permit this mass invasion of privacy and proscription of free speech. Rather, hundreds of articles in dozens of pieces of legislation work to obfuscate the mandate of the government to maintain political order through censorship.

According to *Internet Filtering in China in 2004–2005: A Country Study*, the most rigorous survey of Chinese internet filtering to date, China's censorship regime extends from the fatpipe backbone to the street cyber-café. Chinese communications infrastructure allows packets of data to be filtered at 'choke points' designed into the network, while on the street liability for prohibited content is extended onto multiple parties – author, host, reader – to chilling effect. All this takes place under the watchful eye of machine and human censors, the latter often volunteers.

The ramifications of this system, as the Open Net Initiative's John Parley stressed when he delivered a report to the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission in April, 'should be of concern to anyone who believes in participatory democracy'. The ONI found that 60 per cent of sites relating to opposition political parties were blocked, as were 90 per cent of sites detailing the Nine Commentaries, a series of columns about the Chinese Communist Party published by the Hong Kong-based Epoch Times and associated by some with the banned spiritual movement Falun Gong.

The censorship does not end at the World Wide Web. New internet-based technologies, which looked to lend hope to free speech when ONI filed its last report on China in 2002, are also being targeted. Although email censorship is

not as rampant as many (including the Chinese themselves) believe, blogs, discussion forums and bulletin boards have all been targeted through various measures of state control.

What then, of China's 94 million web surfers? One discussion thread at Slashdot, the well-respected and popular discussion forum for techno-libertarians, is telling. When a well-meaning Westerner offered a list of links prefaced with 'assuming that you can read Slashdot, here are a few web pages that your government would probably prefer you not to read', one poster, Hung Wei Lo responded: 'I have traveled to China many times and work with many H1-B's [temporary workers from outside US] from all parts of China. All of them are already quite knowledgeable about all the information provided in the links above, and most do not hesitate to engage in discussions about such topics over lunch. The fact that you feel all 1.6 billion Chinese are most certainly blind to these pieces of information is a direct result of years of indoctrination of Western (I'm assuming American) propaganda.'

Indeed, anti-Japanese protests [in 2005] have been cited by some as an example of how the Chinese people circumvent their state's diligent censorship regime using networked technologies such as mobile text messages (SMS), instant messaging, emails, bulletin boards and blogs to communicate and organize. The argument here of course is that the authorities were ambivalent towards these protests – one blogger reports that the state sent its own SMS during the disturbances: 'We ask the people to express your patriotic passion through the right channel, following the law and maintaining order.'

China will have to keep up with the slew of emerging technologies making untapped networked communication more sophisticated by the day. . . . Judging by the past record, it cannot be assumed that the state censorship machinery will not be able to meet these future challenges.

Source: Hogge (2005). This article was originally published on the independent online magazine <<http://www/opedemocracy.net/>>. Reprinted by permission of openDemocracy

One issue that complicates the question of media regulation is the very rapid rate of technological change. The media are constantly being transformed by technical innovations, and forms of technology, which were once distinct, are now fusing together. If television programmes are watched via the Internet, for example, what type of media regulation applies? Among member states of the European Union the question of media and telecommunications convergence is at the forefront of debate. While some see the need for coordinated legislation that would harmonize telecommunications, broadcasting and information technology across Europe, this has been difficult to bring about. The role of the EU in media regulation remains weak. The current policy document 'Television without frontiers' was originally due to be revised again in 2002, but has since been postponed as debate continues.

### The global media and democracy

In their work on the global media, Edward Herman and Robert McChesney (1997) explore the effects of international media on the workings of democratic states. On the one hand, the spread of global media sources can successfully put pressure on authoritarian governments to loosen their hold over state-controlled broadcasting outlets. As it becomes increasingly difficult to contain media products within national borders, many 'closed' societies are discovering that the media can become a powerful force in support of democracy (see box about China). Even in a multiparty political system like that of India, we saw that commercialization of television allowed more prominence for

the views of opposition politicians. The global media have allowed for the widespread dissemination of viewpoints such as individualism, the respect for human rights and promoting the rights of minorities.

Yet Herman and McChesney also stress the dangers of the global media order and the threat it poses to the healthy functioning of democracy. As the global media become increasingly concentrated and commercialized, they encroach on the functioning of the important 'public sphere' in the way described by Habermas (see p. 601 above). Commercialized media, they claim, are beholden to the power of advertising revenue and are compelled to favour content that guarantees high ratings and sales. As a result, entertainment will necessarily triumph over controversy and debate. This form of self-censorship by the media weakens citizen participation in public affairs and undermines people's understandings of public issues. According to Herman and McChesney, the global media are little more than the 'new missionaries of global capitalism': non-commercial media space is steadily being taken over by those who are eager to put it to the 'best economic use' (Herman 1998). In their eyes, the 'culture of entertainment' promoted by media institutions is steadily shrinking the public sphere and undermining the workings of democracy.

### The media in a global age

As we have seen throughout this book, the Internet is one of the main contributors to – and manifestations of – current processes of globalization. Yet globalization is

also transforming the international reach and impact of other forms of media as well. In this section we will consider some of the changes affecting the mass media under conditions of globalization.

Although the media have always had international dimensions – such as the gathering of news stories and the distribution of films overseas – until the 1970s most media companies operated within specific domestic markets in accordance with regulations from national governments. The media industry was also differentiated into distinct sectors – for the most part, cinema, print media, radio and television broadcasting all operated independently of one another.

In the past three or four decades, however, profound transformations have taken place within the media industry. National markets have given way to a fluid global market, while new technologies have led to the fusion of forms of media that were once distinct. By the start of the twenty-first century, the global media market was dominated by a group of about twenty multinational corporations whose role in the production, distribution and marketing of news and entertainment could be felt in almost every country in the world.

In their work on globalization, David Held and his colleagues (1999) point to five major shifts that have contributed to bringing about the global media order:

1 *Increasing concentration of ownership*  
The global media is now dominated by a small number of powerful corporations. The small-scale, independent media companies have gradually been incorporated into highly centralized media conglomerates.

- 2 *A shift from public to private ownership*  
Traditionally, media and telecommunications companies in almost all countries were partially or fully owned by the state. In the past few decades, the liberalization of the business environment and the relaxing of regulations have led to the privatization (and commercialization) of media companies in many countries.
- 3 *Transnational corporate structures*  
Media companies no longer operate strictly within national boundaries. Likewise, media ownership rules have been loosened to allow cross-border investment and acquisition.
- 4 *Diversification over a variety of media products*  
The media industry has diversified and is much less segmented than in previous times. Enormous media conglomerates, such as AOL-Time Warner (profiled below), produce and distribute a mix of media content, including music, news, print media and television programming.
- 5 *A growing number of corporate media mergers*  
There has been a distinctive trend towards alliances between companies in different segments of the media industry. Telecommunications firms, computer hardware and software manufacturers, and media 'content' producers are increasingly involved in corporate mergers as media forms become increasingly integrated.

The globalization of the media has thrust 'horizontal' forms of communications to centre stage. If traditional media forms ensured that communication occurred within the boundaries of nation-states in a 'vertical' fashion, globalization is leading to the horizontal integration of communications. Not only are people

making connections with one another at a grass-roots level, but also media products are being disseminated widely due to new harmonized regulatory frameworks, ownership policies and transnational marketing strategies. Communications and media can now more readily extend themselves beyond the confines of individual countries (Srebrenny-Mohammadi et al. 1997).

Yet like other aspects of global society, the new information order has developed unevenly and reflects divisions between the developed societies and less developed countries. In this section we shall explore the dimensions of media globalization before considering arguments by some commentators that the new global media order would be better described as 'media imperialism'.

## Music

As David Held and his colleagues have noted in their investigation into the globalization of media and communications, 'the musical form is one that lends itself to globalization more effectively than any other' (1999: 351). This is because music is able to transcend the limitations of written and spoken language to reach and appeal to a mass audience. The global music industry, dominated by a small number of multinational corporations, has been built on its ability to find, produce, market and distribute the musical abilities of thousands of artists to audiences around the world. The growth of technology – from personal stereo systems to music television (such as MTV) to the compact disc – have provided newer, more sophisticated ways for music to be distributed globally. Over recent

decades, an 'institutional complex' of companies has developed as part of the global marketing and distribution of music.

The global industry in recorded music is one of the most concentrated. The five largest firms – Universal (which absorbed PolyGram in 1998), Time Warner (discussed on pp. 623–5 below), Sony, EMI and Bertelsmann – control between 80 and 90 per cent of all music sales internationally (Herman and McChesney 1997). Until January 2000, when it announced a merger with Time Warner, EMI was the only company among the top five that was not part of a larger media conglomerate. The global music industry experienced substantial growth during the mid-1990s, with sales in developing countries particularly strong, prompting many of the top companies to sign more local artists in anticipation of further market growth. However, as we shall see below the music industry has been challenged by the arrival of the Internet, which allows users to illegally share music for free more easily and extensively than before.

The growth of the global music industry in the post-war period has been due primarily to the success of popular music – originating mainly in America and Britain – and the spread of the youth cultures and subcultures that identify with it (Held et al. 1999). The globalization of music, therefore, has been one of the main forces in the diffusion of American and British styles and music genres to international audiences. The USA and the UK are the world leaders in the export of popular music, with other countries having much lower levels of domestic music production. While some critics argue that the domination of the music industry by these two

countries undermines the success of local musical sounds and traditions, it is important to remember that globalization is a two-way street. The growing popularity of 'world music' – such as the phenomenal success of Latin-inspired sounds in the United States – is testimony to the fact that globalization leads to cultural diffusion in all directions.

### *The Internet and the music industry*

The Internet has changed many aspects of our daily lives; from our leisure pursuits to the way business is conducted. For 'traditional' media companies, such as the music industry, the Internet presents both an enormous opportunity and a serious threat.

Although the music industry is becoming ever more concentrated in the hands of a few international conglomerates, some observers believe that it is the most vulnerable link within the 'culture industry'. This is because the Internet allows music to be shared and downloaded digitally, rather than purchased from local music stores. The global music industry is currently mainly comprised of a complex network of factories, distribution chains, music shops and sales staff. If the Internet removes the need for all these elements by allowing music to be marketed and downloaded directly, what will be left of the music industry?

The music industry is now attempting to come to terms with the effects of digitalization. Global music sales have been falling, with annual record sales down from \$40 billion (£22 billion) to \$30 billion (£17 billion) between 2000 and 2004. The sector has undergone large-scale redundancies and has been forced to restructure. Many in the music industry claim

that the illegal swapping of music files, such as MP3s, over the Internet is one of the major causes of this loss of revenue. Research by the British Phonographic Industry (BPI) found that eight million people in the UK claim to be downloading music, 92 per cent of them using illegal sites (BBC, 7 October 2004). Although attempts are being made to impose tight controls on the replication of legally purchased music, the pace of technological change is eclipsing the ability of the industry to curtail piracy.

One case that attracted much attention in 2000 was the Napster case. Napster is a software program that allows people to trade files over the Internet – including music copied to files on other sharers' computers. The record industry filed several lawsuits against the small company behind Napster, eventually forcing it to stop providing the file-sharing software. However, since the victory over Napster the music industry has had mixed fortunes in its court actions against the companies that support file-swapping on the Internet. In 2003, a US judge ruled that two file-swapping networks, Grokster and Morpheus, were not responsible for the legal status of files traded on their systems, but the legal battle continues.

As well as attacking the companies that create file-sharing software the music industry has gone after individual computer users who illegally share music files. In 2004, the BPI issued a statement claiming it would sue individual music fans who swapped song files over the Internet. This follows similar action by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), which by 2004 had sued more than 5,700 downloaders. In 2003, the RIAA took action against a college student in Michigan,

USA, who ran a network offering more than 650,000 files – the equivalent of more than 43,000 albums (BBC, 7 October 2004).

As well as attacking illegal file sharing, the music industry has begun to adapt to the challenges of the Internet by offering legal download services. The downloading is legal because royalties are paid on the songs to record labels and artists. The Internet has seen a large increase, catalysed by the advent of the portable MP3 player, particularly Apple's iPod, and by the rise in the number of online companies offering songs that can be legally purchased and downloaded. By the end of 2004, more than 125 million legal downloads of songs had been purchased and an official 'music download chart' had been established. After initial rejection of the Internet by the music industry, by the mid-2000s its successful adaptation to selling music through legal downloading was perceived by many in the industry to be crucial to its future (BBC, 28 June 2004).

## Cinema

There are different ways to assess the globalization of cinema. One way is to consider where films are produced and the sources of financing that support them. By such criteria, there has unquestionably been a process of globalization in the cinema industry. According to studies by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), many nations possess the capacity to produce films. In the 1980s approximately twenty-five countries were producing fifty or more films a year, while a small handful of countries – the United States, Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong and India – led all

the others in producing more than 150 films a year (Held et al. 1999).

Another way to assess the globalization of cinema is to consider the extent to which nationally produced films are exported to other countries. In the 1920s, when feature films first saw the light of day, Hollywood made four-fifths of all films screened in the world; today, the United States continues to be the largest influence in the cinema industry. (After the United States, the next largest exporters of films are India, France and Italy.) The governments of many countries provide subsidies to aid their own film industries, but no other country rivals the United States as an exporter of feature films. As figure 15.3 shows, the top-grossing films of all time at the international (non-US) box office were all US films. In 2003, for instance, American films dominated the UK box office, accounting for almost 62 per cent of takings; films solely originating in the UK, by contrast, accounted for just 2.5 per cent of money taken (UK Film Council, 2003).

Hollywood studios generate well over half of their revenues from the overseas distribution of films. In an effort to increase the size of foreign audiences further, these studios are involved in building multiplex cinemas around the world. Global box office revenues are forecast to rise to \$25.6 billion (£14 billion) by 2010, nearly double the 1995 total, as the audiences increase. The spread of video and more recently DVD players globally has also increased the number of people who are now able regularly to watch Hollywood films.

Rank USA films	Year	Country of origin	Total gross revenue (millions of US\$)
1	1997	USA	1,235
2	2003	USA	696
3	2001	USA	651
4	2002	USA	604
5	2002	USA	581
6	1993	USA	563
7	2001	USA	547
8	2003	USA	513
9	1996	USA	505
10	1999	USA	491
Non-USA films			
44	2001	Japan	254
69	1997	UK	211
86	1994	UK	191
96	2001	UK	183

**Figure 15.3** Top-grossing films of all time at the international (non-US) box office, April 2004

Source: Internet Movie Database <<http://www.imdb.com/Top/>>; UNDP (2004), p. 97

## Media 'supercompanies'

In January 2000 two of the world's most influential media companies joined together in what was the largest corporate merger the world had ever seen. In a deal worth \$337 billion, the world's biggest media company, Time Warner, and the world's largest Internet service provider, America Online (AOL), announced their intention to create the 'world's first fully integrated media and communications company for the Internet Century'. The merger brought together the enormous

media 'content' owned by Time Warner – including newspapers and magazines, film studios and TV stations – with the powerful Internet distribution capabilities of AOL, whose subscription base exceeded twenty-five million people in fifteen countries at the time of the merger.

The merger generated enormous excitement in financial markets, as it created the world's fourth largest company. But even more than its size, the deal attracted great attention as the first major union between 'old media' and 'new media'. The origins of Time Warner date back to 1923 when Henry Luce

founded *Time* magazine, a weekly publication that summarized and interpreted the voluminous amount of information contained in daily newspapers. The overwhelming success of *Time* was soon followed by the creation of the business magazine *Fortune* in 1930 and the photographic magazine *Life* in 1936. Over the course of the twentieth century, Time Inc. grew into a media corporation embracing TV and radio stations, the music industry, the vast Warner Brothers movie and cartoon empire, and the world's first twenty-four-hour news channel, CNN. At the time of the merger, Time Warner's annual turnover was \$26 billion; 120 million readers read its magazines each month and the company owned the rights to an archive of 5,700 films, as well as some of the most popular network television programmes.

If the history of Time Warner closely mirrored the general development of communications in the twenty-first century, the rise of America Online is typical of the 'new media' of the information age. Founded in 1982, AOL initially offered dial-up Internet access charged at an hourly rate. By 1994 it had 1 million subscribed users; after introducing unlimited Internet use for a standard monthly fee in 1996, its membership soared to 4.5 million. As the number of users continued to grow – 8 million people were using AOL by 1997 – the company embarked on a series of mergers, acquisitions and alliances, which consolidated its position as the pre-eminent Internet service provider. CompuServe and Netscape were both purchased by AOL, a joint venture with the German company Bertelsmann in 1995 led to the creation of AOL Europe, and an alliance with Sun Microsystems has

allowed AOL to enter the realm of e-commerce.

The merger between the two companies was set to create a \$350 billion multinational, AOL-Time Warner, bringing 24 million AOL subscribers, 120 million magazine readers and the television channels CNN, HBO and Warner Brothers all under one corporate roof. Yet the merger has, so far, suffered grave difficulties. In particular, AOL was never able to meet its ambitious subscriber or revenue targets and the technological spin-offs from combining film and Internet technologies were slow to materialize. As investors adjusted their expectations of what the corporation could achieve, the media giant looked in imminent danger of being forced into a break-up. In 2002, the company posted a loss of almost \$100 billion. That loss resulted in the company dropping AOL from the company name in 2003.

The decline of AOL is now believed to be stabilizing and the company is claiming success in more traditional media such as cable and films. Yet much of the company's immediate accomplishments after 2002 relied upon the success of *The Lord of the Rings* film trilogy. With no guaranteed blockbuster films in the production pipeline at Time Warner, and the Internet service provider industry becoming increasingly competitive, some analysts are wondering how certain the future is for the world's largest media company.

The implications of the AOL/Time Warner merger will not be clear for some time, yet already the lines have been drawn between those who see the deal as unleashing exciting new technological potentials and those who are concerned about the domination of the media by large corporations. The enthusiasts see

the merger as an important step towards the creation of media 'supercompanies' that can deliver direct to people's homes, through the Internet, all the news shows, TV programmes, films and music they want, when they want them.

Not everyone agrees, however, that the idea of media supercompanies is one that should be aspired to. Where enthusiasts see a dream, critics sense a nightmare. As media corporations become ever more concentrated, centralized and global in their reach, there is reason to be concerned that the important role of the media as a forum for free speech, expression and debate will be curtailed. A single company that controls both the content – TV programmes, music, films, news sources – and the means of distribution is in a position of great power. It can promote its own material (the singers and celebrities it has made famous), it can exercise self-censorship (omitting news stories that might cast its holdings or corporate supporters in a negative light), and it can 'cross-endorse' products within its own empire at the expense of those outside it.

The vision of the Internet in the hands of several media conglomerates stands in stark contrast to the idea of a free and unrestricted electronic realm held out by Internet enthusiasts just a few years ago. In its early years, the Internet was viewed by many as an individualistic realm where users could roam freely, searching for and sharing information, making connections, and interacting outside the realm of corporate power. The looming presence of corporate media giants and advertisers has threatened this, however. Critics worry that the rise of corporate power on the Internet will drown out everything

but the 'corporate message' and may lead to the Internet becoming a restricted domain accessible only to subscribers.

It is difficult to assess these competing opinions; almost certainly there is truth in both perspectives. Media mergers and technological advance are sure to expand the way communications and entertainment are organized and delivered. Just as early media pioneers in film and music were influenced by the rise of TV networks and the music industry, so the Internet age will provoke more dramatic changes in the mass media: in coming years, audiences will have much greater choice about what they consume and when. But concerns about corporate domination of the media are not misplaced. Already there are accounts of media conglomerates avoiding coverage of unfavourable news stories relating to partner companies. Arguments for keeping the Internet free and open are grounded in important convictions about the value of an unrestricted public space where ideas can be shared and debated.

It is important to remember that there are few inevitabilities in the social world. Attempts at total control of information sources and distribution channels rarely succeed, either because of anti-trust legislation aimed at preventing monopolies, or through the persistent and creative responses of media users who seek out alternative information routes. Media consumers are not 'cultural dopes' who can be manipulated effortlessly by corporate interests; as the scope and volume of media forms and content expand, individuals are becoming more, not less, skilled, in interpreting and evaluating the messages and material they encounter.

### Media imperialism?

The paramount position of the industrialized countries, above all the United States, in the production and diffusion of media has led many observers to speak of **media imperialism** (e.g. Herman and McChesney 2003). According to this view, a cultural empire has been established. Less developed countries are held to be especially vulnerable, because they lack the resources to maintain their own cultural independence.

The headquarters of the world's twenty largest media conglomerates are all located in industrialized nations; the majority of them are in the United States. Media empires such as AOL-Time Warner, Disney/ABC and Viacom are all US-based. Other large media corporations – apart from the Murdoch empire profiled in the box – include the Japanese Sony Corporation, which owns CBS Records and Columbia Pictures; the German Bertelsmann group, owner of RCA Records and a large US-based set of publishing companies; and the Mondadori, a publishing house controlled by the television corporation owned by Silvio Berlusconi, the Italian Prime Minister (and one of the world's forty richest individuals – see chapter 11, p. 385).

Through the electronic media, Western cultural products have certainly become widely diffused round the globe. As we have seen, American films are available around the world, as is Western popular music. Plans to build a Disney theme park in Hong Kong were announced in 1999. The park, expected to cost \$3.5 billion, is due to open in early 2006 and will largely replicate American attractions, rather

than reflect local culture. As the chairman of Disney theme parks indicated, this may be just the beginning: 'If there is only one Disney theme park in a country with 1.3 billion people, that doesn't compare very well to five theme parks in the US with only a population of 280 million' (quoted in Gittings 1999).

It is not only the more popular entertainment forms that are at issue, however. Control of the world's news by the major Western agencies, it has been suggested, means the predominance of a 'First World outlook' in the information conveyed. Thus it has been claimed that attention is given to the developing world in news broadcasts mainly in times of disaster, crisis or military confrontation, and that the daily files of other types of news kept on the industrialized world are not maintained for developing world coverage.

The global spread of Western, and especially American, culture has led to resentment in some regions and has contributed to a surge in anti-American sentiment in many parts of the world.

### Resistance and alternatives to the global media

While the power and reach of the global media are undeniable, there are forces within all countries that can serve to slow the media onslaught and shape the nature of media products in a way that reflects local traditions, cultures and priorities. Religion, tradition and popular outlooks are all strong brakes on media globalization, while local regulations and domestic media institutions can also play a role in limiting the impact of global media sources.

### Media entrepreneurs: Rupert Murdoch

Rupert Murdoch is an Australian-born entrepreneur who is the head of one of the world's largest media empires. News Corporation's holdings include nine different media operating on six continents. By 2001 News Corporation's turnover was £16.5 billion and it employed 34,000 staff (BBC, 16 July 2001). In October 2004, ABC News reported the annual turnover as £29 billion.

Murdoch established News Corporation in Australia before moving into the British and American markets in the 1960s. His initial purchases of the *News of the World* and the *Sun* in Britain in 1969 and the *New York Post* in the mid-1970s paved the way for a dramatic expansion in later acquisitions. In the USA alone, News Corporation's holdings now include more than 130 newspapers. Murdoch turned many of these newspapers towards sensationalistic journalism, building on the three themes of sex, crime and sport. The *Sun*, for example, became highly successful, with the highest circulation of any daily English-language newspaper in the world, standing at around 3.4 million copies daily in mid-2004.

In the 1980s Murdoch started to expand into television, establishing Sky TV, a satellite and cable chain that, after initial reverses, proved commercially successful. He also owns 64 per cent of the Star TV network based in Hong Kong. Its declared strategy is to 'control the skies' in satellite transmission over an area from Japan to Turkey, taking in the gigantic markets of India and China. It transmits five channels, one of which is BBC World News.

In 1985, Murdoch bought a half interest in Twentieth Century Fox, a film company that owns the rights to more than 2,000 films. His Fox Broadcasting Company started up in 1987 and has become the fourth major television network in the United States after ABC, CBS and NBC. Murdoch now owns twenty-two US television stations, which

account for over 40 per cent of TV households in the United States. He controls twenty-five magazines, including the popular TV Guide, and acquired the US-based publishers, Harper and Row – now renamed HarperCollins – in 1987.

In recent years Murdoch has invested heavily in the profitable digital satellite television industry, particularly through his ownership of Sky and coverage of live sporting events such as basketball and live Premiership football. According to Murdoch, sports coverage is News Corporation's 'battering ram' for entering new media markets (Herman and McChesney 1997). Because sporting events are best viewed live, they lend themselves to the 'pay-per-view' format that is profitable both for Murdoch and for advertisers. Competition for broadcasting rights to key fixtures is intense between News Corporation and other media empires as the



global demand for sport eclipses other kinds of events.

Governments can cause trouble for Murdoch, because, at least within their own boundaries, they can introduce legislation limiting media cross-ownership – that is, a situation where the same firm owns several newspapers and TV stations. The European Union has also expressed concern about the dominant position of very large media companies. Yet Murdoch's power is not easily contained, given its global spread. He is weighty enough to influence governments, but it is in the nature of the telecommunications business that it is everywhere and nowhere. Murdoch's power base is very large, but also elusive.

In a speech given in October 1994, Murdoch took on those who see his media empire as a threat to democracy and freedom of debate. 'Because capitalists are always trying to stab each other in the back,' Murdoch argued, 'free markets do not lead to monopolies. Essentially, monopolies can only exist when governments support them.' 'We at News Corporation,' he went on to say, 'are enlightened.' He discovered that in India, where Star television

transmissions could be picked up, thousands of private operators had invested in satellite dishes and were selling Star programming illegally. Well, what we should do, Murdoch argued, is applaud! News Corporation, he concluded, looks forward to 'a long partnership with these splendid entrepreneurs' (Murdoch 1994).

Murdoch was for a while the head of the largest media organization the world has known. In 1995, however, he was overtaken when the Disney Company and ABC merged. The Disney Chairman at the time, Michael Eisner, made it clear that he wanted to compete with Murdoch in the rapidly expanding markets of Asia. Murdoch's response to the merger was, 'They are twice as big as me now.' Then he added: 'A bigger target.' The merger of AOL and Time Warner presented another target for Murdoch, but it seems clear that he will not shrink from the challenge. The chief executives of Disney, Time Warner and Viacom have all noted that Murdoch is the media executive they respect and fear the most – and whose moves they study most carefully (Herman and McChesney 1997).

Ali Mohammadi (1998) investigated the response of Islamic countries to the forces of media globalization. The rise of international electronic empires that operate across state borders is perceived as a threat to the cultural identity and national interests of many Islamic states. According to Mohammadi, resistance against the incursion of outside media forms has ranged from muted criticism to the outright banning of Western satellites. The reaction to media globalization and the action taken by individual countries in large part reflect their overall responses towards the legacy of Western colonialism and the encroachment of modernity. In analysing Islamic responses to media globalization, Mohammadi divides states

into three broad categories: modernist, mixed and traditional.

Until the mid-1980s, most television programming in the Islamic world was produced and distributed within national borders or through Arabsat – the pan-Arab satellite broadcasting network composed of twenty-one states. The liberalization of broadcasting and the power of global satellite TV have transformed the contours of television in the Islamic world. The events of the 1991 Gulf War made the Middle East a centre of attention for the global media industry and significantly affected television broadcasting and consumption within the region as well. Satellites spread rapidly, with Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Dubai, Tunisia and Jordan all



Aljazeera has become one of the most popular channels in the Middle East.

launching satellite channels by 1993. By the end of the decade, most Islamic states had established their own satellite channels, as well as accessing global media programmes.

Aljazeera is the largest and most controversial Arabic news channel in the Middle East, offering news coverage twenty-four hours a day. Founded in 1996, and based in Qatar, the Aljazeera news network is the fastest growing network among Arab communities and Arabic-speaking people around the world. Some critics have argued that Aljazeera is overly sensational, and shows too much violent and emotion-

ally charged footage from war zones, as well as giving disproportionate coverage to fundamentalist and extremist groups. Its political programmes are most popular, but other shows covering culture, sport and health help to increase the channel's audience share.

In some Islamic states, the themes and material dealt with on Western television have created tension. Programmes relating to gender and human rights issues are particularly controversial; Saudi Arabia, for example, no longer supports BBC Arabic because of concerns over its coverage of human rights issues. Three Islamic

states – Iran, Saudi Arabia and Malaysia – have banned satellite access to Western television. Iran has been the staunchest opponent of the Western media, branding it a source of ‘cultural pollution’ and the promotion of Western consumer values.

Such strong responses are in the minority, however. Mohammadi concluded that, although Islamic countries have responded to media globalization by attempting to resist or provide an alternative, most have found it necessary to accept certain modifications to their culture in order to maintain their own cultural identity. In his eyes, the ‘traditionalist approach’, such as that favoured by Iran and Saudi Arabia, is losing ground to responses based on adaptation and modernization (Mohammadi 1998).

## Conclusion

As individuals, we don’t control technological change, and the sheer pace of such

change threatens to swamp our lives. The often cited notion of an ‘information superhighway’ suggests an orderly road map, whereas the impact of the new technologies often feels chaotic and disruptive.

Yet the arrival of the wired-up world, thus far at any rate, hasn’t produced any of the overwhelmingly negative scenarios predicted by some sceptics. ‘Big Brother’ has not emerged as a result of the Internet: rather to the contrary, it has promoted decentralization and individualism. In spite of the enormous hype surrounding the potential collapse of the global computer infrastructure at the turn of the millennium – from the so-called ‘Y2K bug’ – the moment passed relatively uneventfully. Finally, books and other ‘pre-electronic’ media look unlikely to disappear. Bulky as it is, this book is handier to use than a computerized version would be. Even Bill Gates has found it necessary to write a book to describe the new high-tech world he anticipates.

## Summary points

- 1 The mass media have come to play a fundamental role in modern society. The mass media are media of communication – newspapers, magazines, television, radio, cinema, videos, CDs and other forms – which reach mass audiences, and their influence on our lives is profound. The media not only provide entertainment, but provide and shape much of the information we act on in our daily lives.
- 2 The newspapers were among the most important of early mass media. They continue to be significant, but other, newer media, particularly television and the Internet, have supplemented them.
- 3 Next to the Internet, television is the most important development in the media over the past forty years. In most countries the state has been directly involved in the administration of television broadcasting. Satellite and cable technology are altering the nature of television in fundamental ways; public television broadcasting is losing audience share as a multiplicity of channels become available, and governments have less control over the content of television programmes.

- 4 In recent years, advances in new communications technology have transformed telecommunications – the communication of text, sounds or images at a distance through a technological medium. Digitization, fibre optics and satellite systems work together to facilitate multimedia – the combination of several media forms in a single medium – and interactive media, which allow individuals actively to participate in what they see or hear. Mobile telephones are currently at the forefront of innovations in telecommunications.
- 5 The Internet is allowing unprecedented levels of interconnectedness and interactivity. The number of worldwide Internet users has been growing rapidly and the range of activities that can be completed online continues to expand. The Internet is providing exciting new possibilities, but some worry that it may undermine human relationships and communities by encouraging social isolation and anonymity.
- 6 The media industry has become globalized over the past three decades. Several trends can be noted: the ownership of media is increasingly concentrated in the hands of large media conglomerates; private ownership of media is eclipsing public ownership; media companies operate across national borders; media companies have diversified their activities; and media mergers have become more frequent. The global media industry – music, television, cinema and news – is dominated by a small number of multinational corporations.
- 7 The sense today of inhabiting one world is in large part a result of the international scope of media and communications. A world information order – an international system of the production, distribution and consumption of informational goods – has come into being. Given the paramount position of the industrial countries in the world information order, many argue that developing countries are subject to a new form of media imperialism. Many critics worry that concentration of media power in the hands of a few companies or powerful individuals undermines the workings of democracy.
- 8 A range of different theories of the media have been developed. Innis and McLuhan argued that the media influence society more in terms of how they communicate than in what they communicate. In McLuhan’s words, ‘the medium is the message’: TV, for example, influences people’s behaviour and attitudes because it is so different in nature from other media, such as newspapers or books.
- 9 Other important theorists include Habermas, Baudrillard and Thompson. Habermas points to the role of the media in creating a ‘public sphere’ – a sphere of public opinion and public debate. Baudrillard has been strongly influenced by McLuhan. He argued that the new media, particularly television, actually change the ‘reality’ we experience. Thompson argues that the mass media have created a new form of social interaction – ‘mediated quasi-interaction’ – that is more limited, narrow and one-way than everyday social interaction.

## Questions for further thought

- 1 Should governments seek to protect national cultures by limiting the spread of satellite and cable TV?
- 2 Does the Internet undermine authoritarian governments? Is it different from older media in this?
- 3 If your only source of information was soap operas, in what ways would your view of your country be distorted or incomplete?
- 4 Has the concentration of ownership in the music industry led to a reduction in consumer choice?
- 5 Will the globalization of communication improve our understanding of cultural differences or annihilate those differences?

## Further reading

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## Internet links

Foundation for Information Policy Research (UK)  
<http://www.fipr.org>

The Modernist Journals Project  
<http://www.modjourn.brown.edu>

News Watch  
<http://www.newswatch.org>

OECD ICT Homepage  
[http://www.oecd.org/topic/0,2686,en\\_2649\\_37409\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_37409,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/topic/0,2686,en_2649_37409_1_1_1_1_37409,00.html)

Theory.org  
<http://www.theory.org.uk>