## Media Studies: 4

Theories and Approaches 1: Production

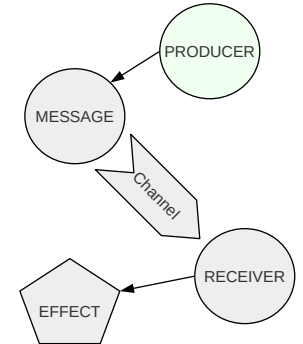## Outline

- Hypotheses about media organisations
- Layers of influence on organisations
  - International
  - National
  - Social
  - Individual, etc

## Lasswell's model

- **Who says** what in which channel to whom with what effect?
- **"Producers"**

## Denis McQuail

- **Structure**: size, ownership, 'functions' etc
- **Conduct**: the systematic activities of a media organisation
- **Performance**: type and amount of 'product' that gets offered to audiences in the end

## Denis McQuail

Suggests there are two 'overarching issues'...

- **Freedom**
  - How much of this does a media organisation possess within society, how much freedom is possible within the organisation?
- **Routines**
  - How much do these affect selection, processing and presentation of content?

Shoemaker and Reese 1991

## Five hypotheses

- Content reflects social reality (media as mirror)
- Content is influenced by media workers' socialisation and attitudes (identity?)
- Content is influenced by media routines
- Content is influenced by other social institutions and 'forces outside the media'
- Content is a function of ideological positions and maintains the status quo
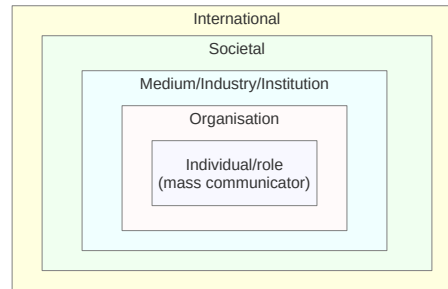
## Media Organisations?

- Name some 'media organisations'
- Name some types of 'mass communicator'

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## Model of 'levels of analysis'

International
Societal
Medium/Industry/Institution
Organisation
Individual/role
(mass communicator)

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## International

- **Organisations may...**
  - be part of some international media conglomerate
  - be affected by international laws, oversight bodies and conventions
  - 'feel' as of they play a part in the 'national voice' within international society

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## International: 2

- Murdoch UK tabloid 'price war'
- International Telecommunications Union (ITU)
- *NHK World* (?), other 'national broadcasters' overseas services

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## International Conglomerate

- Businesses within the same group, but **operating in different markets**, can be used to **cross-subsidise**.
- UK Tabloid 'Price War' of early 1990s
- *The Sun*: **25p → 20p** (JPY33 → 26)
  - "increased its sales by between 180,000 and 200,000 [...] costing the paper £900,000 a week in lost cover price revenue."
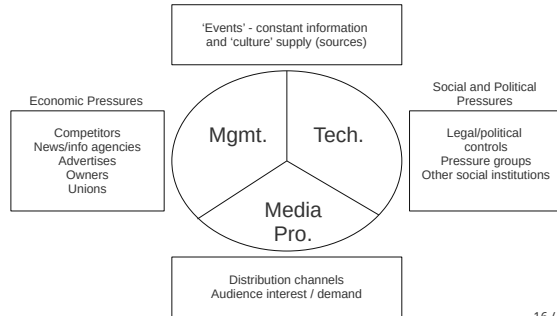- Intention was to damage circulation of rival *Mirror* (but also nearly killed *Today* (d.Nov 1995)

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## Societal

- 'Advocates' → MEDIA ORG. → 'audience' (Westley and McLean 1957)
- Mass communicators work under pressure from a variety of 'power roles' (advertisers, competitors, authorities, audience etc) (George Gerbner etc)
- **Mass communicators work within a web of societal forces, both liberating and constraining**

## 'Societal forces'

'Events' - constant information and 'culture' supply (sources)

Economic Pressures
- Competitors
- News/info agencies
- Advertises
- Owners
- Unions

Social and Political Pressures
- Legal/political controls
- Pressure groups
- Other social institutions

Mgmt. | Tech.

Media Pro.

Distribution channels
Audience interest / demand

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## Organisational 'Goals'

- Operating within this web of pressures, what media organisations decide to do is related to the **goals** they set themselves.
- **Goals** are often ambiguous, and unstated
  - Profit, social influence/prestige, max. audience, sectional goals, public interest
- 'utilitarian' vs. 'normative' (idealistic)
  - 'Normative' press theory stresses primacy of meeting needs of audience (before making money!)

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## Owners

"The class which has the means of **material** production has control at the same time over the means of **mental** production so that, thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it … Insofar, therefore, as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an epoch, it is self-evident that they … among other things … regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age: **thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch**."

K.Marx & F. Engels, *The German Ideology* (c.1846)

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## Owners

- To what extent are media organisations *independent* of their owners and investors?
- Altschull (1984) suggests
  - **"The content of the news media always reflects the interests of those who finance the press"**

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## Influence vs 'credibility'

"Newspaper owners are free to use their papers to make propaganda, if they wish to do so, provided they accept the risk of losing readers and credibility" (McQuail, p291)



Rupert Murdoch

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## General hypotheses (market model)

**The probability of an even/issue becoming news:**

- Inversely proportional to the harm this information might cause investors or sponsors
- Inversely proportional to cost of coverage
- Directly proportional the expected breadth of appeal to audiences that advertisers are willing to pay for

McManus, J. H. (1994). *Market-driven journalism: Let the citizen beware?* SAGE Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.

## Advertisers

Two primary ways of funding mass-media:

- **Public Service Media:** licences, subscriptions, taxation
- **Commercial Media:** subscriptions, advertising
  - Ratio of these two varies widely (eg. free papers are 100% ad funded)

## Advertisers

- 2015: Peter Oborne, (ex)*Telegraph*
- "It has long been axiomatic in quality British journalism that **the advertising department and editorial should be kept rigorously apart**.

  There is a great deal of evidence that, at the Telegraph, this distinction has collapsed."

## Oborne's verdict

- "If advertising priorities are allowed to determine editorial judgments, how can readers continue to feel [...] trust? The *Telegraph's* recent coverage of HSBC amounts to a form of fraud on its readers. **It has been placing what it perceives to be the interests of a major international bank above its duty to bring the news to *Telegraph* readers.**"

## Relations with the audience

- "Research tends to show the audience as having a **low salience** for many actual communicators" (McQuail p294)
- Tension between 'professionals' who work in the media industries and audience
- Industry reliance on generalised data (ratings, circulations)

## Individual / Role

- Who do mass communicators think they are communicating with?
- Does the identity and social background of MCs actually have any consistent effect on content?

## Alastair Hetherington (1985:38)

- "Oh, we're writing for the editor of course. He's the audience."
- "My wife, she's the critic."
- "Will it get people talking over the breakfast table or in the pub? That's what I ask myself."
- "If I like it, that's the only quotient I put on it. I recking that I'm an average reader."

## Personal Characteristics

- Does it matter who journalists or mass communicators (MCs) are (as people)?
- MCs generally work within an organisation

  Organisations can...
  - act to reduce 'personal authorship"
  - provide amplification for the views of those with influence within the organisation

## Knowledge of the audience

- 'Mutual ignorance'
- Should MCs be guided by 'what the audience wants' or by some other 'standard'?
- What sets (for example) the news agenda?
  - Popularity or importance?
  - Aim for 'clicks' or 'pursuit of important thruths'?

## Professionalism

- Within various media roles there are different understandings of 'professionalism' (technical proficiency etc)
- Is **'journalism'** a profession?
- What does 'professionalism' mean for journalists?

## Summary

- Media production takes place in a broad variety of contexts
- To understand why certain content is produced we need to start to understand the influences of this context
- Individuals may be **less influential** than the organisational structures they work in

## References

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McManus, J. H. (1994) *Market-driven journalism: Let the citizen beware*. SAGE, Thousand Oaks, CA.

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Shoemaker, P.J. and Reese, S.D. (1991) *Mediating the Message:Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content*. Longman, New York; London.

Westley, B. H. and MacLean, M. S. (1957) A Conceptual Model for Communications Research. *Journalism Quarterly*, 34(1): 31–38

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