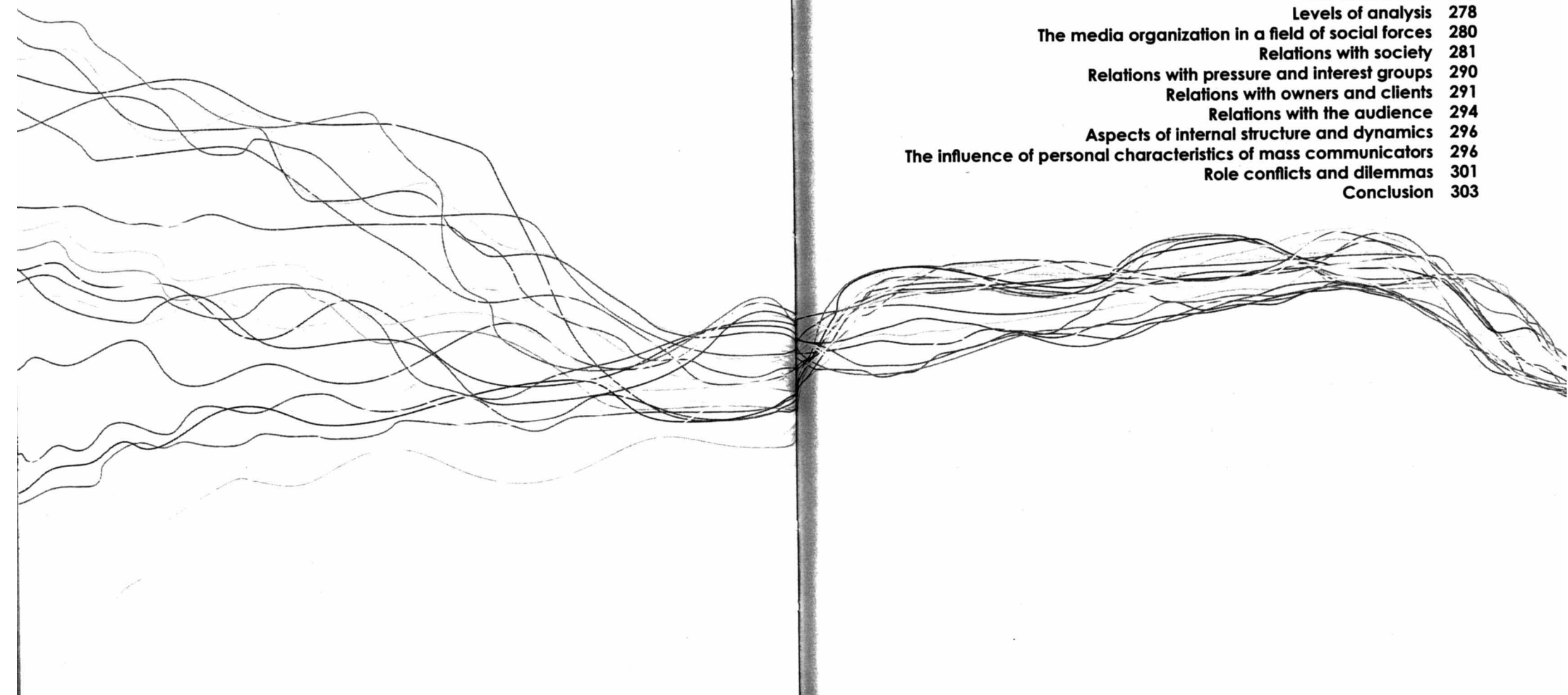


11

The Media Organization: Pressures and Demands

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Theory about mass communication began with little awareness of the place where media messages originated, except for the vague designation of a 'mass communicator' as source. The originating organization was taken for granted and theory began with the message itself. Research on media production, after beginning with descriptions of media occupations, especially in film and journalism (Rosten, 1937, 1941), gradually widened its focus so as to take account of professional cultures and the occupational context of media work that could affect what was produced. This chapter looks in turn at each of the main kinds of influence that are brought to bear during the production and processing phase of mass communication. These include external influences from society and the media market as well as from owners, advertisers and the audience. These are looked at primarily from the perspective of the 'communicators' themselves. Attention is also paid to relations internal to the media organization and to the conflict, tensions and problems encountered. The main tensions arise from recurring dilemmas that lie at the heart of media-making. These include the potential clash between profit on the one hand, and art or social purpose on the other, and the problem of reconciling creative and editorial freedom with the demands of routine and large-scale production.

The overriding aim of the chapter is to identify and assess the potential influence of various organizational and communicator factors on what is actually produced. Research into 'news-making', prompted initially by evidence of patterning and selective attention (sometimes called 'bias') in news content, showed the news product to be, in one sense or another, both a routine product of a 'news factory' (Bantz et al., 1980) and also a very predictable symbolic 'construction' of reality. It is here that the choice of critical perspective (and wider social theory) comes into play. Less attention has been paid to the production of non-journalistic content, especially drama, music and entertainment, but similar forces are at work.

Major changes in the structure of media industries, especially the processes of globalization, ownership conglomeration and organizational fragmentation, provide new theoretical challenges. New means of distribution (such as cable, satellite and the Internet) have also given rise to new kinds of media organization, although research and theory have still to catch up.

Research Methods and Perspectives

A very simple and general framework within which questions can be posed was introduced in Chapter 9. *Structural* features (for instance, size, forms of ownership and media-industrial functions) can be seen as having direct consequences for the *conduct* of particular media organizations. Conduct refers to all the systematic activities that in turn affect *performance*, in the sense of the type and amount of media content produced and offered to audiences. According to this model, we need to look not only at internal features of media organizations but also at their relations with other organizations and with the wider society.

Most of the research and theory discussed in the following pages are 'media-centric' rather than 'society-centric' (see pp. 12–13), taking or recording the view from within the media. This may lead to an over-estimation of the significance of organizational influences on content. From a 'society-centric' point of view, much of what media organizations do

is determined by external social forces, including, of course, the requirements of media audiences. The question of 'paradigm choice' (see pp. 65–6) has not been very sharply posed in relation to research on media organizations since it calls for a mixture of both qualitative and quantitative methods and attracts critical as well as neutral perspectives.

The predominant method of research has been participant observation of media people at work or in-depth interviewing of involved informants. However, this method requires co-operation from the media organizations under study and this has been increasingly difficult to obtain. On some points, survey research has provided essential additional information (for instance, on questions of occupational role and social composition).

In general, the theory that has been formulated on the basis of research into media organizations, while fragmentary, has been fairly consistent. It supports the view that content is systematically more influenced by organizational routines, practices and goals than by personal or ideological factors. However, this proposition is itself open to alternative interpretations. It could be taken to mean that ownership and control influence content, thus supporting the social critical view. Or it could reflect the fact that any kind of standardized or mass production process involves some systematic influence on content. From the latter perspective, the 'bias' that has been observed in media content is more likely to be caused by work routines than by hidden ideology.

The Main Issues

Two overarching issues of structure and content can be identified:

- What degree of freedom does a media organization possess in relation to the wider society, and how much freedom is possible within the organization?
- How do media-organizational routines and procedures for selecting and processing content influence what is produced?

These two questions roughly correspond to the duality noted above of the structural effect on organizational conduct and the effect of the latter, in its turn, on content produced. Shoemaker and Reese (1991) name five main hypotheses concerning the influence of structural and organizational factors on content, as shown in Box 11.1.

Hypotheses about factors influencing content (Shoemaker and Reese, 1991) 11.1

- Content reflects social reality (mass media as mirror of society)
- Content is influenced by media workers' socialization and attitudes (a communicator-centred approach)
- Content is influenced by media-organizational routines
- Content is influenced by social institutions and forces outside the media
- Content is a function of ideological positions and maintains the status quo (the hegemonic approach)

The first of these hypotheses is not directly discussed in this chapter, although the kind and degree of 'reflection of reality' are certainly affected by a number of organizational factors. The most directly relevant of the five hypotheses are the second, third and fourth. The final hypothesis also largely lies outside the scope of this chapter because it is so broad. However, in general, it presumes that media organizations are not really autonomous, but are penetrated by other sources of power (especially political and economic). The more it appears that outside forces shape the operation of media, the more plausible this hypothesis becomes. Some light will be shed on this matter later.

Levels of Analysis

It is increasingly difficult to speak of a 'media organization' as if there were a single ideal-typical form. The original term was largely based on the model of an independent newspaper, within which all the principal activities of management, financial control, news collecting, editing and processing, plus printing and distribution, took place more or less under one roof. This model was always untypical of media in general, not applying, for instance, to the film, book publishing or music industries, and applying only variably to radio and television. It is virtually impossible to apply it to most of the so-called new media, which interrelate several separate and disparate organizational functions.

The diversity of organizational forms is matched by the diversity of occupational groups that might qualify as 'mass communicators'. These have been taken as including movie moguls and press tycoons, actors, television producers, film directors, scriptwriters, book authors, newspaper and broadcast journalists, songwriters, disc jockeys, musicians, literary agents, newspaper and magazine editors, website designers, advertisers and public relations people, campaign managers, and many more. Most of these categories can also be subdivided according to the type of medium, size or status of the work organization, employment status, and so on. An increasing amount of media work takes place on a freelance or entrepreneurial basis, and many media workers (notably writers and actors) belong to no single production organization, even if they may be members of professional or craft associations. As a result, the concepts of 'mass communicator' and of 'media profession' are almost as leaky as that of media organization.

The uncertainty on what counts as a media organization and what counts as a mass communicator has increased considerably as a result of the expansion and **digitization** of media and the rise of the Internet. Deuze (2007) sees this uncertainty as the main defining feature of media work in a world that is characterized by 'liquidity', mobility and lack of compartmentalization. The same content can appear on many media platforms. There is no professional or economic monopoly on the potential to reach a large audience by way of the Internet. Moreover, there is an increasing tendency for media to make, employ or encourage user-generated content in many different forms. The seemingly alternative social media sites are also being used by 'big media' and major communicators for advertising and publicity.

Despite this diversity, it still makes sense to try to place questions of media organization within a common framework. One useful step is to think in terms of levels

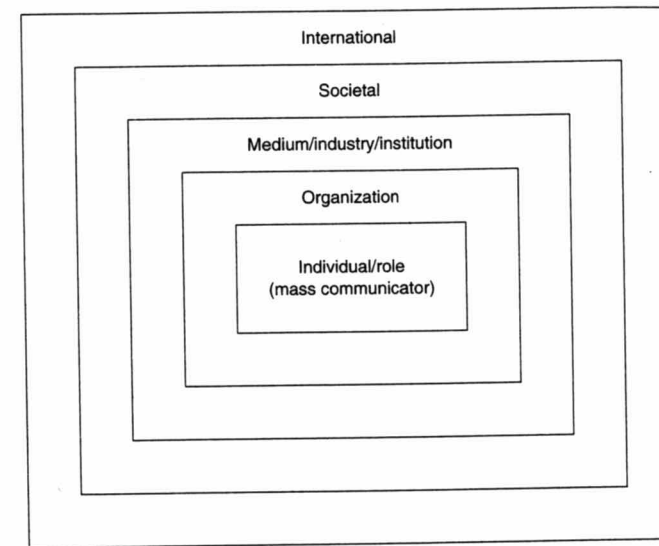


Figure 11.1 Mass media organizations: levels of analysis

of analysis, so that the different phases of media work and the significant relations between units of organizational activity and between media and the 'outside world' can be identified for study. Dimmick and Coit (1982), for instance, describe a hierarchy with nine different levels at which influence or power may be exercised. The main levels and associated sources of influence, in descending order of 'distance' from the point of production, are supranational, the society, media industry, supra-organizational (e.g. media conglomerates), the community, intra-organizational and individual.

For the purposes of this chapter, a similar but modified hierarchy is employed, as shown in Figure 11.1. There is no hierarchy in the sense that the 'higher-order' influence has primacy in terms of strength and direction, but it does serve to represent the society-centric perspective, according to which media are dependent on their society. It also corresponds to the most likely general balance of power in society. Even so, it is more appropriate to consider the relations between media communicators and their environment as, in principle, interactive and negotiable. It is also appropriate to emphasize that the media organization operates within and maintains its own 'boundaries' (however permeable) and has some degree of autonomy.

The arrangement of entries in Figure 11.1 recognizes the significance of the individual who carries out media work and is subject to the requirements of the organization, but also has some freedom to define his or her place in it. Most of the discussion which follows relates to the central area of the 'organizational level', but also takes account of the relations across the boundary between the work organization and other agents and agencies of the wider media institution and society.

It is clear from Chapter 7 that media organizations in their relations with the wider society are formally or informally regulated or influenced by normative expectations on either side. Such matters as the essential freedoms of publication and the ethical guidelines for many professional activities are laid down by the 'rules of the game' of the particular society. This implies, for instance, that the relations between media organizations and their operating environments are governed not solely by law, market forces or political power, but also by unwritten social and cultural guidelines and obligations.

The Media Organization in a Field of Social Forces

Any theoretical account of media organizations and occupations has to take note of a number of different relationships within and across the boundaries of the organization. These relationships are often active negotiations and exchanges and sometimes conflicts, latent or actual. The influential model of mass communication drawn by Westley and MacLean (1957), which has already been discussed (pp. 85-6), represents the communicator role as that of a broker between, on the one hand, would-be 'advocates' in society with messages to send and, on the other, the public seeking to satisfy its information and other communication needs and interests.

Gerbner (1969) portrayed mass communicators as operating under pressure from various external 'power roles', including clients (such as advertisers), competitors (other media in the main), authorities (especially legal and political), experts, other institutions and the audience. He wrote:

While analytically distinct, obviously neither power roles nor types of leverage are in reality separate or isolated. On the contrary, they often combine, overlap and telescope ... the accumulation of power roles and possibilities of leverage gives certain institutions dominant positions in the mass communication of their societies.

Using these ideas and relying on the wide support for such a view in the research literature, we can portray the position of the media organization in general terms as follows. Those within it have to make decisions at the centre of a field of different constraints, demands or attempted uses of power and influence, as in Figure 11.2. The general hierarchy shown in Figure 11.1 has been converted into a view of more specific actors and agencies in the environment of a media organization. This representation is primarily derived from research on news media (especially newspapers), but the picture would be much the same for many similar 'self-contained' and multipurpose media, including broadcast television (see, for example, Wallis and Baran, 1990).

The pressures and demands illustrated in Figure 11.2 are not all necessarily *constraining* on media organizations. Some can be sources of liberation, for instance, by way of alternative sources of income, or government policy protection for their task. Some of the forces cancel or balance each other (such as audience support against advertiser pressure, or media institutional prestige against external institutional or source pressure). Lack of external pressure would probably indicate social marginality or insignificance.

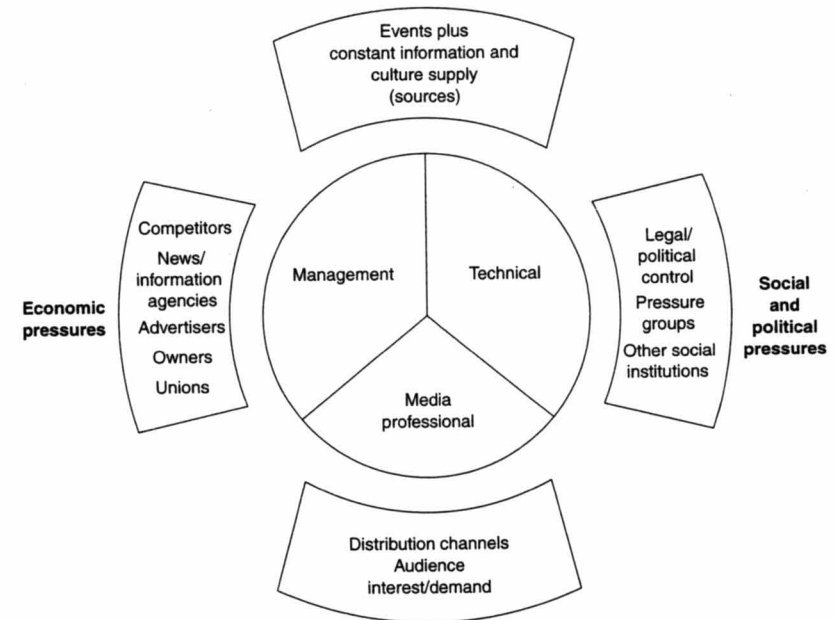


Figure 11.2 The media organization in a field of social forces

A further refinement of this scheme, based on the work of Engwall (1978), involves the internal division of the media organization into three dominant work cultures (management, technical and professional), indicating the main sources of tension and lines of demarcation which have been found to exist within media organizations. This presentation allows us to identify five main kinds of relationship - with society, with pressure groups, with owners, clients and sources, with audiences and also internally - which need to be examined in order to gain some understanding of the conditions affecting organizational activity and the mass communicator role. Each of the five types of relationship is discussed in the following pages.

Relations with Society

A good deal has already been said on this matter, especially in Chapters 7 and 9. The influence of society is ubiquitous and continuous, and arises in virtually all of the media's external relationships. In liberal-democratic societies, the media are free to operate within the limits of the law, but conflicts still occur in relations with

government and with powerful social institutions. The media are also continually engaged, sometimes in an antagonistic way, with their main sources and with organized pressure groups. How these issues are defined and handled depends in part on the self-defined goals of the media organization.

The ambiguity of media organizational goals

Most organizations have mixed goals, and rarely are they all openly stated. Mass media are no exception, and they may even be particularly ambiguous in this respect. In organizational theory, a differentiation is often made between utilitarian and normative organizational goals (e.g. Etzioni, 1961). The utilitarian organization aims to produce or provide material goods or services for financial ends, while the normative organization aims to advance some value or achieve a valued condition, based on the voluntary commitment of its participants. The position of mass media organizations in respect of this typology is unclear since they often have a mixture of utilitarian and normative goals and forms of operation. Most media are run as businesses but often with some 'ideal' goals, and some media are run primarily for 'idealistic' social or cultural purposes, without seeking profit. For instance, public broadcasting organizations (in Europe especially) have generally had a bureaucratic form of organization but with non-profit social and cultural goals.

Another suggested basis for organizational classification distinguishes according to *type of beneficiary*. Blau and Scott (1963) ask: 'Is it the society as a whole, a particular set of clients, the owners, the audience, or the employees of the organization, whose welfare or good is being served?' Again, no single answer can be given for the media as a whole, and particular organizations often have several actual or potential beneficiaries. Nevertheless, there is some reason to hold that the general public (not always the direct audience) should be the chief beneficiary (see the discussion of public interest on pp. 163-4).

A common element in all the normative press theories discussed (in Chapter 7) is that the media should meet the needs and interests of their audience in the first instance and the interests of clients and the state only secondarily. Since media depend on the continuous voluntary choices of their audiences if they are to be either effective or profitable, this principle has a common-sense basis, and it accords with the media's own view.

Tunstall (1971) described the organizational goals of news journalism in economic terms, distinguishing between revenue goals and non-revenue goals. The latter refer to purposes without a direct financial aspect, such as gaining prestige, exercising influence or power in society, or achieving some normative end (for instance, serving the community). Revenue goals are of two main kinds: gaining income from direct sales to consumers and from selling space to advertisers. Different kinds of publication policy go with the variation of goals in these terms. While the audience appears to be subordinate in this typology, in practice the satisfaction of advertisers and the gaining of revenue from sales both depend on pleasing the audience, and non-revenue goals are often shaped by some conception of wider public interest. Furthermore,

Tunstall indicates that in the case of conflict of goals within a newspaper, the audience revenue goals (increasing the circulation by pleasing the audience) provide the 'coalition goal' on which most can agree (especially management and journalists).

Some media organizations (especially public service media and those with an opinion-forming or informational purpose) clearly do seek to play some part in society, but the nature of this role is also open to diverse interpretations. Certain kinds of publication, especially prestige or elite newspapers (such as *Le Monde*, the *Financial Times* or the *Washington Post*), have set out deliberately to be influential through the quality of their information or the authority of their opinion (Padioleau, 1985). There are several other options for the exercise of influence, and it is not the exclusive property of an internationally known elite press. Small-scale media can be influential in more restricted spheres, and influence can obviously be exercised by mass circulation newspapers and popular television. The various goals of media organizations are summarized in Box 11.2. These are not mutually exclusive, but typically one or other is given overriding priority.

Main goals of media organizations 11.2

- Profit
- Social influence and prestige
- Maximizing an audience
- Sectional goals (political, religious, cultural, etc.)
- Serving the public interest

The journalist's role: engagement or neutrality?

A broad choice has to be made between a more active and participant or a more neutral and societal role for the journalist. Cohen (1963: 191) distinguished two separate self-conceptions of the reporter's role as that of 'neutral reporter' or 'participant'. The first refers to ideas of the press as informer, interpreter and instrument of government (lending itself as channel or mirror), the second to the traditional 'fourth estate' notion, covering ideas of the press as representative of the public, critic of government, advocate of policy and general watchdog.

The weight of evidence is that the neutral, informative role is most preferred by journalists, and it goes with the importance attached by most journalists to objectivity as a core professional value (Janowitz, 1975; Johnstone et al., 1976; Schudson, 1978; Tuchman, 1978; Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996). Weaver (1998: 478) concluded from an overview of a 21-nation study of journalists that 'the single professional role most journalists agree on is the importance of getting information to the public quickly'. Strong political commitment (and active engagement) is by definition not easy to reconcile with even-handed neutral reporting, and many news organizations have guidelines designed to limit the influence of personal beliefs on reporting. The preference for 'objectivity'

also accords with the commercial logic of media businesses, since partisanship tends to narrow the audience appeal. Journalists in popular tabloid media seem to adopt much the same view on this as do more heavyweight journalists for the elite press, even if the results are very different (Deuze, 2005).

The active or participant role has also received considerable support, depending on conditions of time and place and on how it is understood. Fjaestad and Holmlov (1976) identified two main kinds of purpose, each endorsed by over 70% of journalist respondents in Sweden: those of 'watchdog' on local government and of 'educator' or public informant. Johnstone et al. (1976) found that 76% of US journalists thought it extremely important that media should 'investigate claims and statements made by government'. This is in line with several elements in the North American journalistic tradition. These include the political philosophy of 'reformism' (Gans, 1979), the choice of an 'adversary role' *vis-à-vis* government (Rivers and Nyhan, 1973) and the idea that media should look out for the interests of their audience, whom they claim to represent. This is different from partisan advocacy of a particular point of view.

A survey of US journalists by Weaver and Wilhoit (1986) showed that in 1982–3 there had been some withdrawal from the critical perspective held by journalists in 1971, although they remained somewhat reformist in spirit and, on balance, politically more inclined to the left than to the right. Endorsement of the questionnaire item on the 'extreme importance' of media investigating claims and statements made by government had dropped from 76% to 66%, and there was more support for neutral-informative than for participant elements of the journalist's role. Nevertheless, there was also significant minority support for an 'adversary' role.

A similar enquiry in the early 1990s found approximately the same balance of views on journalists' roles (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996: 133–41). Differences in choice of predominant role have been shown to correspond with different value priorities. Plaisance and Skewes (2003) found that opting for an adversary role was correlated with personally endorsing the values of courage, independence, justice and open-mindedness, while the 'disseminator' role went with values of 'minimizing harm', fairness and self-control. This suggests an element of personality determination.

In place of the simple 'neutral versus participant' dichotomy, Weaver and Wilhoit (1986) opted for a tripartite division of roles as interpreter, disseminator or adversary, in that order of prominence. The *interpreter* role was based on the items 'analysing and interpreting complex questions', 'investigating claims made by government' and 'discussing national policy as it happens'. The second type – that of *disseminator* – mainly relates to 'getting information to the public quickly' and 'concentrating on the largest possible audience'. The third, *adversary*, role (applying to both government and business) was much weaker but was still recognized to some degree by a majority of journalists. The resulting scheme of role perceptions is reproduced in Figure 11.3, showing the main overlap between them. The percentages in the three boxes show the choice by the whole sample of journalists for the roles indicated. The figures attached to the arrows show the percentage of the source box who also endorsed the role at the destination (for example, 45% of those choosing the adversary role also selected that of disseminator). This reveals something of the structure of attitudes, the 'bridge' position between the adversarial and informational positions. The picture was much the same in the early 1990s (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996).

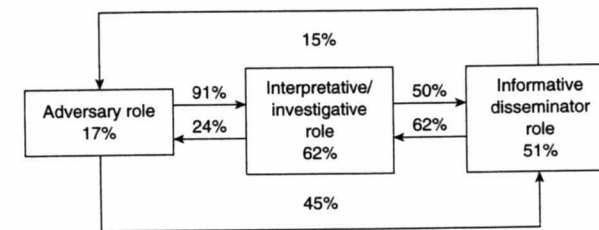


Figure 11.3 Journalists' role perceptions: interpretation and information come first, with opposition a clear but distinctive third option (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1986)

Public broadcasting institutions, such as the BBC, are under a particular obligation to be neutral and balanced, and the chief aim of BBC decision-makers in news and actuality has been described as 'holding the middle ground' (Kumar, 1975) – acting as a broker between disputants rather than being a participant. The question as to whether this lends itself to supporting the established social order has often been discussed. However, this does not prevent fundamental criticism being reported or carried. While times have changed, the forces at work are likely to be similarly balanced. The crisis experienced by the BBC in reporting controversial aspects of the Iraq war in 2003–4 showed how sensitive the relations with government can be. In general, public broadcasting organizations in continental Europe provide more open recognition of different political and ideological streams and also of government influence.

The *plurality* of role conceptions held by journalists is also stressed by Weaver and Wilhoit, who write (1986: 116): 'only about 2 percent of the respondents are exclusively one-role oriented'. They also remind us that, on such matters as role perception and journalistic ethics, there seem to be large cross-cultural differences. Patterson (1998) compared the journalistic cultures of five countries – the United States, Britain, Germany, Italy and Sweden – based on surveys with journalists in each country. One of the main differences stemmed from the wide variation in the degree of partisanship of media systems as a whole, according to journalists' own perceptions. In particular, the United States was exceptional in the degree to which its major news organizations were perceived as concentrated in the middle of the political spectrum. While objectivity as a norm was regarded as of some importance in each country, its meaning varied quite a lot. The predominant meaning ascribed by American journalists was as 'expressing fairly the position of each side in a political dispute'.

This is in line with 'indexing' theory, as discussed in Chapter 9 (pp. 242–3). However, international comparison suggests that journalists tend to follow the national consensus of their own country. For instance, the media in Germany were mainly critical of the military intervention in Iraq in 2003, but in doing so were also following the main policy line of the German government (Lehmann, 2005) and also German public opinion. British media were divided on the issue, torn between supporting the official interpretation of national interest and a mainly unfavourable public opinion. According to Patterson's study, journalists in Germany and Sweden attach much more weight to getting 'beyond the statements of the contending sides to the

hard facts of a political dispute'. On the face of it, this is much more independent and interventionist, but the general principle that news journalism reflects the balance of power and opinion in society also seems to hold.

A new dimension to research has been added by the opportunity to compare role conceptions of journalists after the fall of communism in Europe. An example is Wu et al.'s (1996) survey of American and Russian journalists. On most points, especially in relation to information dissemination, objectivity and expressing public opinion, the two populations were similar, but Russian journalists opted for a more politically active role. Yet there is also a difference emerging between an older and a newer generation of Russian journalists (Votmer, 2000; Pasti, 2005).

It looks as if role conceptions are both variable and quite strongly related to political culture and the degree to which democracy is firmly established (see Weaver, 1998: 477–8). For instance, in countries where democracy is weaker, there is less emphasis on the watchdog role. Weaver (1996: 87) remarks that 'political system similarities and differences are far more important than cultural similarities and differences, organizational constraints or individual characteristics in predicting the variance in perceptions of three roles (timely information, interpretation, and entertainment) by journalists in these countries'.

It is also useful to consider the concept of different 'national news cultures', as suggested by Deuze (2002). It looks as if Britain, Australia and the United States are differentially more attached to the watchdog, informational and investigative roles. Germany and The Netherlands do not share this strong attachment, but they are distinctive in giving attention to the role of 'standing up for the disadvantaged'. Deuze suggests this might reflect a 'pro-people' rather than 'anti-government' stance.

Journalism as a profession

The study of the journalistic role has been strongly influenced by the general notion of a profession, derived from the sociology of occupations. A profession is typically thought to have several key features, especially: a significant public role in society; a core body of expertise requiring long training; self-control of entry and regulation; clear codes of ethics and conduct. On balance, there seems to be stronger arguments for denying journalism the status of profession than otherwise. Knight et al. (2008) provide a catalogue of objections to the claim, especially the low public esteem for and trust in journalists and their susceptibility to propaganda from powerful sources or commercial interests.

Fengler and Russ-Mohl (2008) add a new dimension to the debate by proposing an 'economic theory of journalism', according to which most of the alleged tendencies and defects of journalistic behaviour can be explained by economic motives and calculations on the part of individual journalists or media firms. Support for this view can be found in Bourdieu's 'field theory of journalism', which focuses on the key issue of autonomy. In this theory the reference is to a 'field of forces' in which many external influences are at work. In the case of journalism, the pressures come mainly for the neighbouring fields of economics or politics, resulting in a lower degree of autonomy.

Benson and Neveu (2005: 11) emphasize the degree to which news has become a political institution in its own right. Treating journalism as a loosely interrelated set of activities, with unclear boundaries, does seem to accord with the increasingly diverse reality of 'news work'. In the end, it may not greatly matter to those outside whether or not the occupation is classed as a profession, although the degree to which relevant criteria of professionalism are met does matter. These criteria have to do with the quality of work done, the reliability of information published, the honesty of purpose and the benefits for society that are sought.

Several observers have emphasized the existence of an 'ideology of journalism', although there are different versions of what it contains, depending on the institutional setting and national location. In a thorough analysis of 'journalistic culture', Hanitsch (2007) lists the ideological elements of objectivism, empiricism and alternative ethical tendencies of either idealism or relativity. Fengler and Russ-Mohl (2008), in line with their economic theory, are dismissive of what they call a 'nirvana approach' that portrays journalism as an idealistic form of public service. Deuze (2005: 447) has given a fairly consensual view of the main components of journalistic ideology. These are as shown in Box 11.3. As Deuze notes, some of these elements are inconsistent or contradictory.

The occupational ideology of journalists: main elements (Deuze, 2005) 11.3

- Public service
- Objectivity
- Autonomy
- Immediacy
- Ethics

For members of most professions, the appropriate wider social role which they perform is usually 'taken care of' by the institution – as in medicine or teaching – leaving individuals to concentrate on the practice of their skills. To a certain extent this is true of mass communicators, but full professionalization has been held back by the internal diversity of media and the wide range of goals. There is also a continued uncertainty about what is actually the central and unique professional skill of the journalist (and this is even more in question for other media occupations). The sociologist Max Weber (1948) referred to the journalist as belonging to 'a sort of pariah caste' and, like the artist, lacking a fixed social classification. Schudson (1978) aptly characterized journalism as an 'uninsulated profession', because of the lack of clear boundaries.

According to Tuchman's (1978) study of news work, professionalism has largely come to be defined according to the needs of the news organization itself. The height of professional skill is the exercise of a practical craft, which delivers the required informational product, characterized by a high degree of *objectivity*, key marks of which are

obsessive facticity and neutrality of attitude. The objectivity of news has become, in her view, the equivalent of a professional ideology. This analysis is consistent with other indications from media work that professionalism is a degree of accomplishment which cannot be measured by tests or examinations and can only be recognized by fellow professionals. A study of the BBC by Burns (1977) found that professionalism was understood not only in terms of the mission of the organization but as a dedication to the task and craft of making 'good television'. It was interpreted as the opposite of 'amateurism'.

The question of whether journalism should be considered as a profession remains in dispute, both within and without the media world. Windahl et al. (2007) conclude that the knowledge base of journalists does not command the same respect as that of occupational groups that are acknowledged to be professions. Kepplinger and Koecher (1990: 307) maintain that 'journalists cannot really be counted among the professional class', largely on the grounds that they behave very selectively with those they have to deal with and professionals should treat everyone equally. They write that journalists also deny a moral responsibility for unintentionally negative consequence of their reports, while applying a stronger standard to others. However, the same authors also observe that 'this selectivity is a basis for the reputation of journalism and a prerequisite for its success' (1990: 307). Olen (1988) makes a similar point by contending that journalism *should not* become a profession since it involves the exercise of a right to freedom of expression that cannot be monopolized by an institution (that of journalism).

It can also be argued that the critical role of the press may oblige it at times to act in an 'irresponsible' way, as defined by established institutions. Intended here are actions that break rules and conventions but also may serve the public interest. Such actions can range from exposing scandals in high places to revealing alleged national secrets. The publication of the secret 'Pentagon papers' by *The New York Times* in 1971, against strong government pressure, is a favourite example. The documents showed US policy in Vietnam in a very negative light and contributed to further decline in public support for the war, but was also argued to have cost American lives. In the UK, the publication in 2009 of stolen confidential details of expenses claimed by Members of Parliament was widely held to be justified by its results.

There is some evidence of a generally increased tolerance for 'unethical' practices. Some light is shed on this issue by Brodasson's (1994: 242) contention that journalism does at times at least have one important attribute of other professions – that of 'sacredness'. Journalists do have occasion to perform altruistic services. He writes that while journalism 'falls short on some traditional criteria ... it is evident that both its perceived functions as a vital service and its sacred aspect are present in at least some sectors of journalism'. He also comments that it is intimately connected with democracy, but paradoxically is most likely to display its altruism and sacredness under non-democratic conditions, when it requires dedication and bravery.

Online journalism

* The rise of online journalism continues in a number of forms, partly as an extension of existing print journalism and partly as various types of news weblogs (or **blogs**). The latter began as more or less personal journals or commentaries but have developed

as an alternative news space, earning the title of 'blogosphere' (Reese et al., 2007). There is a great deal and wide variety of independent news sources (Sundae and Ness, 2001), plus much that is unprofessional and idiosyncratic. This can be interpreted as both positive and negative. Boczkowski (2004) sees journalism becoming less journalist-centred and more user-centred, as well as losing its clear boundary as a professional activity. Deuze (2003) distinguished four main types of online journalistic site, as follows: mainstream, indexing and category, meta-journalism and comment, and share and discussion. Bardool (2002) pointed to key features of online journalism as being interactivity, hypertextuality, multimodality and asynchronicity.

Domingo and Heinonen (2008) propose a typology of journalistic weblogs along a continuum from least to most institutionalized in relation to the established media. At one end are blogs produced by members of the public outside media control and at the other end those that are produced by professional staff journalists. In between are 'audience blogs' that are written by members of the public at the invitation of the media and also 'journalistic blogs' that are written by professional journalists on their own account, aside from their normal work. This last form is not always welcomed by media organizations and creates problems with respect to impartiality and editorial policy as well as issues of copyright. Even so, their existence gives support to the cause and claim of journalistic autonomy. In general, online news, in whatever form, seems to give more attention to the role of interpreter rather than of disseminator of information or adversary (Cassidy, 2005).

Normally, journalistic content online has potential advantages in terms of space available (few constraints) and the opportunity to call upon a range of sources, or to provide external links. While this does happen (see Arcetti, 2008), there are also indications that most online news follows established patterns of sourcing and does not stray far from the boundaries of the national media system. The mainstream media operate within a specific geographic market. A Canadian study (Gasher and Klein, 2007) of the websites of three different leading online news sites – *The Times* (UK), *Liberation* (France) and *Haretz* (Israel) – suggests that the same pattern applies online. The percentage of named places with a domestic location in each country was respectively 93%, 68% and 89%. Singer (2005) studied twenty weblogs in the mainstream media dealing with politics and civic affairs and found them to follow the same procedures as in mainstream news. There are many links, but mostly to other mainstream media sites. She speaks of journalists as 'normalizing' the weblog in terms of traditional journalistic norms and practices. Elsewhere, Singer (2007) writes of the claim of the 'popular' (i.e. non-professional) blog sector as adopting the self-appointed role of 'watchdog of the watchdogs'. The evidence of a fairly close relation in practice between traditional media and the more serious section of the blogosphere continues to grow. Messner et al. (2008) speak of a 'source cycle', with traditional media and blogs drawing on each other and certain blogs becoming legitimated as sources as a result. Reese et al. (2007) describe a complementary relationship between traditional media and citizen bloggers.

The Internet blog offers opportunities for improving relations with an audience but it also threatens the 'ownership' of the news by journalists. McCoy (2001), on the basis of a case study, underlined the tendency of the established press to affirm its authority as the definer of what is news in the face of the new media challenge. In

another sense, it is a threat to ownership by virtue of the ease with which almost any provider can offer a basic news service, drawing on the main news agencies. Although online journalism has been welcomed for potentially increasing diversity and access, the reality is not always so promising. Cohen (2002) described it as on the whole even more 'market-driven' and commercial than established newspaper journalism, notwithstanding its claim to be more autonomous.

Relations with Pressure and Interest Groups

Relations between media and society are often mediated through a wide range of more or less informal, but often organized, pressure groups which seek to influence directly what the media do – especially by trying to set limits to what they publish. There are many examples of established bodies, such as religious, occupational or political bodies, complaining and lobbying on a range of issues, often to do with matters of morality, perceived political bias or minority representation (Shoemaker and Reese, 1991). In many countries there is legal and social pressure on the media to be positive towards minorities of all kinds, including ethnic groups, women, gays and lesbians, and more sensitive to the needs of vulnerable groups such as children, the poor, disabled and homeless people, and the mentally ill.

While the media are usually cautious in handling such pressures and are reluctant to yield their autonomy (the pressures often tend to cancel each other out), there is evidence of success by outside agencies in influencing content. Usually access depends on perceived legitimacy of the claim to be heard, but sometimes PR can influence this perception (Yoon, 2005). Access may also be given where a medium's commercial interests might be threatened by bad publicity. According to an extensive (US) study by Montgomery (1989: 217), the most effective advocacy groups 'were those whose goals were most compatible with the TV network system and whose strategies were fashioned with a keen sense of how that system functioned'. Success also depends on the degree of support among the general public for a particular advocacy position. The general effect is likely to show up in entertainment television as blandness, conformity and an avoidance of controversy. In general, the media are less open to external pressures of this kind in relation to 'hard' news.

It is usually impossible to distinguish unacceptable pressure (or the act of yielding to it) from the general tendency of the media to try to please as many of their audiences (and advertisers) as possible and to avoid hurting minorities or encouraging antisocial activities. The media are also wary of legal reprisal (Tuchman, 1978) and inclined to avoid unnecessary controversy or departures from verifiable facts which are in the public domain. Media avoidance behaviour in response to social or legal pressure has to be accepted as legitimate, within the rules of the media-institutional 'game', but the general result is to ensure a differentially more positive treatment for the better-organized and more socially central minorities and causes (Shoemaker, 1984). Weaker and more deviant groups get a worse press and exert little influence. Paletz and Entman (1981: 125) exemplified such marginal groups with little positive access to, or control over, media coverage as 'unofficial strikers, urban rioters,

welfare mothers, student militants, radicals and impoverished reactionaries'. The composition of this category will vary, but the general principle remains the same. For instance, Lubbers et al. (1998) showed that Dutch press reports relating to minorities appeared to operate within an implicit hierarchy of favourability of treatment that ranged from the most established to the newest kinds of immigrant group.

Relations with Owners and Clients

The central issue which arises under this heading is the extent to which media organizations can claim to exercise autonomy in relation first to their owners, and secondly to other direct economic agencies in their environment, especially those which provide operating funds: investors, advertisers, sponsors. According to Altschull's (1984) dictum that 'The content of the news media always reflects the interests of those who finance the press', the answer is fairly clear and also consistent with the principles of free press theory in its 'market' version. Nevertheless, there is usually some scope for autonomy on the part of 'communicators'.

Proprietor influence

There is no doubt that owners in market-based media have ultimate power over content and can ask for what they want to be included or left out. There is plenty of circumstantial evidence to show that this power is used (Shoemaker and Reese, 1991; Curran and Seaton, 1997) (see also Chapter 9, pp. 227–9). Even so, there are quite strong conventions relating to journalism which protect the decision-making autonomy of editors on particular news stories. Meyer's (1987) survey evidence confirmed that US journalistic ethics frowned on owner intervention, although editors reported a fair degree of autonomy in practice. Similar evidence was obtained in Britain by the Royal Commission on the Press (1977). Schultz's (1998) study of Australian journalists showed strong support for the fourth estate role, but also a recognition that it was often compromised by commercial considerations and owner pressure. It is not too surprising that journalists should claim more autonomy, or that editors of established newspapers are reluctant to admit being told what to do by proprietors.

Nevertheless, there is an inevitable tendency for owners of news media to set broad lines of policy, which are likely to be followed by the editorial staff they employ. There may also be informal and indirect pressure on particular issues that matter to owners (for instance, relating to their other business interests) (Turow, 1994). Much credible, but often anecdotal, evidence supports this conclusion, and, in the end, the theory of economically free press legitimates this state of affairs. 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. The worldwide press condemnation of Unesco's efforts to improve international reporting,

as reported by Giffard (1989), is a convincing example of the media industry protecting its own interests. There is an argument, though one difficult to substantiate, that media have simply become too big a business to be run by personal whim, and decisions have to be taken impersonally on grounds of managerial and market considerations.

The general effect of monopoly media ownership on content has proved difficult to pin down (see, for example, Picard et al., 1988), although there is little doubt that a condition of true monopoly would be harmful for freedom of expression and consumer choice. Shoemaker and Reese (1991) conclude that those who work for large chains are likely to have a lower attachment to and involvement in the community in which they work. For them, the (larger) media organization takes precedence over community influence. Correlatively, locally based media may gain strength and independence from ties with the community or city that they serve. The degree of freedom for journalists, producers, writers and entertainers in public broadcasting may be formally less than in market-based media (although this is not necessarily so), but the limits are normally clear and not subject to arbitrary breach or suspension.

The influence of advertisers

The consequences of advertising financing for media content are perennially discussed. On the one hand, it is obvious that the *structure* of much of the mass-media industry in most capitalist countries reflects the interests of advertisers – something that has developed historically along with other social and economic changes. It is no accident that media markets often coincide with other consumer divisions (see Chapter 9). Most free-market media are finely tuned to jointly maximizing the needs of advertisers and their own interests as a normal condition of operation. The ‘normal’ influence extends to the matching of media content patterns according to the consumption patterns of targeted audiences. Media design, layout, planning and scheduling often reflect advertiser interests. What is less easy to demonstrate is that particular advertisers can directly intervene to influence significant publication decisions in their own interests, beyond what is already provided for in the system.

As with proprietorial intervention in news, there is little doubt that it happens from time to time on a local or specific basis (e.g. Shoemaker and Reese, 1991). McManus (1994) describes a systematic pattern of commercial influence on reporting. Baker (1994: 99) observes that ‘advertisers, not governments are the primary censors of media content in the United States today’. He cites evidence of advertisers using their market power to attempt to block particular communications that damage their interests and also of advertiser pressure that influences personnel as well as editorial decisions in the media. But influence comes in diverse forms that are often hard to detect and not necessarily illegitimate (for instance, providing information that has a promotional value, product placement, sponsoring, etc.). Bogart (1995: 93–4) summarizes the (in his view, considerable) influence of advertising on media content in terms of five key points, as shown in Box 11.4.

The influence of advertising (Bogart, 1995) 11.4

- Advertisers rarely try to buy journalists to slant news in their favour; more often they try to suppress news they don't like
- They are sensitive about the environment for their messages and edgy about controversy
- When advertisers yield to vigilante pressure, media producers veer towards self-censorship
- Advertisers shape content when they sponsor broadcast programmes
- The virtual end of local press competition shows how advertisers determine the life and death of media

Advertiser influence is generally ethically disapproved, especially when it affects news (Meyer, 1987), and it may not even be in the interests either of media (especially news media) or of advertisers to be seen to be too close to each other. Both can lose credibility and effectiveness if a form of conspiracy against the media public is suspected. In general, it seems that economically strong and ‘elite’ media are best in a position to resist undue pressure (see Gans, 1979). But the same is true of media that are supported by varied balanced sources of revenue (that is, subscriber payments as well as advertisers, or, in Europe especially, broadcast licence revenue plus advertising income). Media organizations most likely to be influenced by advertiser pressure are those whose sole or overwhelming source of revenue is advertising, especially where the competition is heavy (Picard, 2004).

The main pressures and constraints on news arising from the media market have been summarized by McManus (1994) in terms of a ‘market model’. This is derived from the principle that market forces require conduct that minimizes cost, protects the interests of owners and clients, and maximizes the income-producing audience. The model is expressed in the statement about news selection contained in Box 11.5.

Main predictions of the market model (McManus, 1994) 11.5

The probability of an event/issue becoming news is:

- inversely proportional to the harm the information might cause to investors or sponsors;
- inversely proportional to the cost of covering it;
- directly proportional to the expected breadth of the appeal to audiences that advertisers are willing to pay for.

The main difference from a 'journalistic theory of news production' lies in the lack of any reference in such a theory to harm to owners or costs and a concentration on the significance of the story and the size of an interested audience. As McManus notes, the two theories do not lead to differences of selection in all cases and, under certain ideal conditions of rationality, perfect knowledge and diversity, the models might even converge. Cohen (2002) supposes that online media are especially likely to follow the market-driven model.

Relations with the Audience

Although the audience is, by conventional wisdom, the most important of the clients and influences in the environment of any media organization, research tends to show the audience as having a low salience for many actual communicators, however closely ratings and sales figures are followed by management. Media professionals display a high degree of 'autism' (Burns, 1969), consistent perhaps with the general attitude of professionals, whose very status depends on their knowing better than their clients what is good for them.

Hostility to the audience?

Altheide (1974: 59) comments that the pursuit of large audiences by the television stations which he studied 'led to a cynical view of the audience as stupid, incompetent and unappreciative'. Elliott (1972), Burns (1977) and Schlesinger (1978) found something of the same to be true of British television. Schlesinger (1978: 111) attributed this partly to the nature of professionalism: 'A tension is set up between the professionalism of the communicator, with its implied autonomy, and the meeting of apparent audience demands and desires, with their implication for limiting autonomy.' Ferguson (1983) also reported a somewhat arrogant attitude to the audience on the part of women's magazine editors. In her study of Australian journalists, Schultz (1998) uncovered some resentment at the need to please the audience, thus limiting autonomy. She associated this with a 'reduced capacity to understand public opinion' (1998: 157) and an unwillingness to accept accountability mechanisms. Gans (1979) reported that US TV journalists were appalled by the lack of audience recognition of what they found good. The situation stems partly from the fact that the dominant criterion applied by the organization is nearly always the ratings (i.e. the volume of sales of the product, the size of the audience sold to the advertiser). However, most media professionals, with some justification, do not recognize ratings as a very reliable measure of intrinsic quality.

It is possible that hostility towards the audience is somewhat exaggerated by media respondents themselves, since there is contrary evidence that some media people have a strong positive attitude to their audience in the abstract. Ferguson, again, noted that women's magazine editors showed a strong sense of responsibility

to their audience and wanted to provide a helpful service (1983: 140). Weaver and Wilhoit (1986) found that the single most important factor contributing to work satisfaction of journalists was the possibility of helping people (endorsed by 61%). They also found that the single most frequent source of feedback to journalists was from individual members of the audience. The resistance to ratings and other audience statistics, which are largely a management tool with little to say about actual audiences (Ang, 1991), should not necessarily be equated with negative views of the audience. In the sphere of online media, direct feedback from the audience can sometimes be threatening to individual communicators, but there is also a new opportunity to turn contacts into a tool of management.

Insulation and uncertainty

On a day-to-day or item-by-item basis, most mass communicators in established media do not need to be concerned about the immediate response of the audience, and they have to take decisions about content in advance of any response. This, coupled with the intrinsic difficulty of 'knowing' a large and very disparate audience, contributes to the relative insulation described above. The most common institutional device for making contact with the audience, that of audience research, serves an essential management function and relates media to the surrounding financial and political system, but seems to convey little that is meaningful to the individual mass communicator (Burns, 1977; Gans, 1979). Attitudes to the audience tend to be guided and differentiated according to the role orientations set out above.

Among communicators, if one follows the line of Burns' findings, the 'pragmatic' are happy with the ratings which also satisfy the organization. The craft-oriented are content with the judgements of their fellow professionals. Those committed to the goals of the organization (for instance, carrying out a cultural mission, or political or commercial propaganda) are content with these goals as internally assessed. Those wishing to have influence in society look to their influential contacts in relevant social contexts. For everyone, there are friends, relatives and casual contacts who can provide feedback of a more comprehensible kind.

Images of the audience

There remains a continuing problem of uncertainty for those who do want to communicate, who do want to change or influence the general public and use media for this purpose, or who direct themselves at minorities or minority causes where impact matters (see Hagen, 1999). One readily available solution is the construction of an abstract image of the kind of people they would like to reach (Bauer, 1958; Pool and Shulman, 1959). According to Gans (1957: 318), 'The audience participates in the making of a movie through the audience image held by the creator.' Shoemaker and Reese (1991: 96) conclude that 'Journalists write primarily for themselves, for their editors, and for other journalists.' Nevertheless, communicating to a large and amorphous audience 'out there'

is bound to remain problematic for those who care about 'getting a message across'. Audiences are mainly just spectators, who observe and applaud but do not interact with the senders and performers (Elliott, 1972).

Media organizations, as distinct from the individual 'communicators' within them, are to a large extent in the business of producing spectacles as a way of creating audiences and generating profit and employment (see the 'publicity model' on pp. 72–3). They need some firm basis on which to predict the interests and likely degree of attention of an audience. As Pekurny (1982) points out, feedback from ratings cannot tell you how to improve television programmes, and neither are they often available until long after a programme is made. Pekurny says that the 'real feedback system' is not the home viewing audience but the writers, producers, cast and network executives themselves. In addition, there is strong reliance on the 'track records' of particular producers and production companies and on reusing successful past formulas. This conclusion is supported by Ryan and Peterson (1982), who tell us that in popular music the most important factor guiding selection in the production process (see p. 332) is the search for a good 'product image'. This essentially means trying to match the characteristics of previously successful songs.

Aspects of Internal Structure and Dynamics

The analysis made so far, in line with the scheme in Figure 11.1, points to a degree of differentiation and division within the boundaries of the organization. There are several sources of division. One of the most obvious is the diversity of function (such as news, entertainment or advertising) of many media organizations, with different interests competing for status and finance. The personnel of media organizations come from different social backgrounds and vary according to age, gender, ethnicity, social background and other attributes. We have already noted the duality of purpose of many media (both material and ideal) and the endemic conflict between creative ends (which have no practical limits) and the need to organize, plan, finance and 'sell' media products. Most accounts of media-organizational goals point to differences of orientation and purpose that can be a source of latent conflict.

Internal diversity of purpose

The fact that mass media organizations have mixed goals is important for locating the media in their social context, understanding some of the pressures under which they operate and helping to differentiate the main occupational choices available to media workers. It is one essential aspect of a general ambiguity over social role that has already been discussed. Some further light on this question is shed by the characterization of the newspaper as a 'hybrid organization' (Engwall, 1978), in the sense that it cannot be clearly placed on either of two key organizational dimensions:

the manufacture–service dimension, and the dimension of variability of product technology and use. The newspaper organization is engaged in both making a product and providing a service. It also uses a wide variety of production technology, from the simple to the complex.

In varying degrees, this holds true for other mass media organizations, certainly in broadcasting. Engwall found that several different 'work cultures' flourish, each justified according to a different goal or work task – namely, the news-oriented culture, the politically oriented, the economically oriented and the technically oriented. The first two tend to go together and are expressed by the professional or creative category noted above (also closer to the 'normative' type), while the second two are essentially 'utilitarian', having much in common with their counterparts in other business organizations. In so far as this situation can be generalized, it seems that media organizations are likely to be as internally divided as to purpose as they are different from each other. That this should happen without excessive conflict suggests some fairly stable forms of accommodation to the attendant problems. Such an accommodation may be essential in what Tunstall (1971) has characterized by the paradoxical term of 'non-routine bureaucracy'.

The Influence of Personal Characteristics of Mass Communicators

Many studies of media organizations or occupations include, as a matter of course, an examination of the social background and outlook on society of the group of respondents under study. This is sometimes because of an assumption that the personal characteristics of those most directly responsible for media production will influence content. It is a hypothesis that accords well with the ideology or mythology of the media themselves and stands opposed to the notion of organizational or technological determinism. It is also a familiar idea among audiences that the personality and values of the author, for instance of a novel or a film, will give the work its primary meaning, despite its being processed in a media industry. The expectation that media will 'reflect society' (the first hypothesis considered on pp. 227–8) can be supported on the grounds either that it is what their audiences want or that those who work in the media are a cross-section of society, at least in their values and beliefs.

However, these views need to be modified to allow for the influence of organizational goals and settings. Most media products are the work not of a single author but of teams, and ideas of personal authorship are not very relevant, despite the tendency of media to promote individual stars and celebrities. Shoemaker and Reese (1991) suggest that lines of influence can follow one or other of the paths shown in Figure 11.4. In essence, what is shown are two alternative paths – one in which organizational role subordinates or conceals personal characteristics, and another in which having power or status in an organization permits an individual communicator to express their personal beliefs and values in public communication.

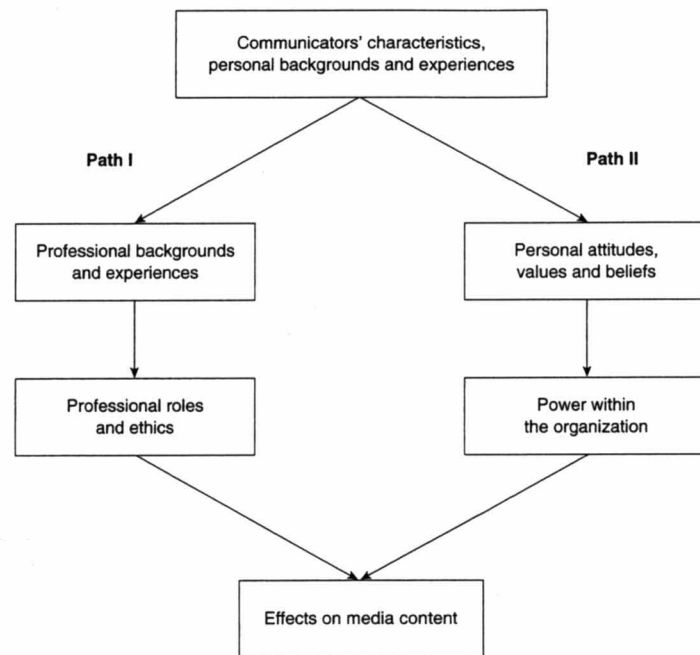


Figure 11.4 How factors intrinsic to the communicator may influence media content: institutional versus professional pathways (Shoemaker and Reese, 1991)

The first question to arise is whether there is any distinctive pattern of social experience or personal values to be found among media communicators. Inevitably, there are as many descriptions of social background as there are studies, and even though most concern journalists, there is no single pattern to report. However, there is a good deal of evidence, not surprisingly, to show that journalists in many countries are not marginal in income terms but belong on average to the middle category, and thus within the economically secure sector of society, without being rich.

There are evidently big variations between the stars of journalism and the ordinary salariat, as in other branches of media business. Lichter and Rothman (1986), for instance, painted a portrait of 240 personnel of elite US news media, showing them to be not only well off but demographically unrepresentative in being more white and more male than the country as a whole and less likely to hold a religious belief. One can probably assume that people who work for less elite media are also less of an elite themselves, although they may still be demographically unrepresentative (for instance, in terms of gender and ethnicity).

Weaver and Wilhoit (1986, 1992) found that, since 1971, the composition of the corps of US journalists had changed remarkably in one respect: a much greater

representation of women (from 20% to 34%), although there were relatively fewer black and Hispanic journalists. A survey of American media personnel in 1996 showed only 11% to be of minority ethnic origin, a good deal below the general population figure. There seems little doubt about the general class position of the average media worker: it is a middle-class occupation, but less professionalized or well paid than other established professions (law, medicine, accountancy, etc.) and with a small elite of well-paid stars. Peters and Cantor's (1982) account of the movie acting profession stresses the extreme gap between the powerless and insecure many and the minority at the top.

The theoretical significance of such observations is less easy to establish. Johnstone et al. (1976) concluded that 'in any society those in charge of mass communication tend to come from the same social strata as those in control of the economic and political systems'. Gans (1979) also suggested that the middle-class position of the journalistic profession is a guarantee of their ultimate loyalty to the system. Therefore, they are free, in the US system, because they can be trusted to see and interpret the world in much the same way as the real holders of power, holding the same basic ideology and values. Gans found that news journalists generally held what are called 'motherhood' values, including support for the family and a nostalgia for small-town pastoralism. They also tended to be ethnocentric, pro-Democratic, individualistic and in favour of 'responsible capitalism', moderatism, social order and leadership.

Gans' interpretation is persuasive, more so than the alternative idea that they are not only an elite but a left-leaning one, according to Lichter and Rothman (1986), with subversive motives and a penchant for supporting deviance and extremist movements. This image of 'liberal' media has often been restated in the USA. Gans' view of journalists as 'safe' but not reactionary is also more convincing than the other notion that they are a conservative elite, mainly serving the interests of the state, the governing class and big business (as inferred by Herman and Chomsky, 1988).

More significant than evidence of the values held by journalists (but not inconsistent with it) may be the finding that media personnel owe most of their relevant attitudes and tendencies to socialization from the immediate work environment (e.g. Breed, 1955; Weaver and Wilhoit, 1986: 127-8). This thesis, while not discounting the influence of social background and personal belief, returns us to the greater probability of organizational, rather than individual and subjective, determination. We need also to keep in mind that journalists and others tend, where possible, to work for organizations with compatible values. The possibility for personal influence by mass communicators varies according to the genre and the type of organization. Non-news genres offer more scope for expressing personal beliefs, and there is probably more scope where commercial and financial pressures are less (Tunstall, 1993).

The review of evidence by Shoemaker and Reese (1991) relating to the influence of personal beliefs and values is inconclusive. Even so, to conclude that there is no influence would seem to rule out any real degree of personal autonomy and to overestimate the power of work socialization (see also Plaisance and Skewes, 2003). Shoemaker and Reese (1991: 72) see the relation as variable: 'it is possible that when communicators have more power over their messages and work under fewer constraints, their personal attitudes, values and beliefs have more opportunity to influence content' (see Figure 11.4). It is fairly evident, for instance, that individuals who

reach high status in different media (journalism, film, television, music) do have and use opportunities for expressing personal opinions and beliefs. The 'logic of media', which favours personalization, often supports this tendency, as long as it does not also conflict with commercial logic.

Women in news organizations

The case of gender seems to promise a good test of the proposition that personal characteristics will influence content, since it has been a claim of part of the feminist movement that the media have been in various ways on the 'other side' in numerous campaigns throughout the gender war. As usual, it turns out not to be so easy to reach a conclusion. There is an empirical correlation between the relatively low numbers and lower occupational status of women in news media organizations (Gallagher, 1981; Thoveron, 1986; *Media Studies Journal*, 1993; European Commission, 1999) on the one hand, and the under-representation or stereotyping of women in the news (for instance, in terms of topic and context, as well as the more obvious use of female 'sex symbols') on the other. A European Commission report (1999) cites studies showing that in French news media only 17% of those cited or interviewed were women. Similar figures showed 22% for Finnish news and 13% in the United Kingdom. The same source concludes that women 'portrayed in the media are younger, more likely to be shown as married, less likely to be shown as in paid employment', compared with men (1999: 12). An extensive study of the way in which US electronic news media framed feminists and feminism showed both topics as making a rare appearance and, where they do, to be demonized and trivialized. Content implicitly differentiated between feminists and 'regular women' (Lind and Salo, 2002).

The issue is not confined to the question of news, but news is often singled out as of particular significance for the wider question of gender inequality and construction in society. The correlation between male domination (in power positions if not always numerically) of virtually all media organizations and male-oriented themes or patriarchal values offers prima facie support for the view that greater occupational equality in the media would make a difference to content (see Chapter 5). The evidence for this remains weak, however. Baehr (1996) says that decisions about content are much more influenced by financial necessity than by personal preference. The European Commission report cited above is also doubtful about any automatic connection between numbers of women employed in media (even in senior positions) and the way women are portrayed.

According to evidence from The Netherlands reported by van Zoonen (1994), the typical lesson learnt in journalism schools was that 'feminism – even moderately defined – and professional journalism were at odds with each other'. In other words, socialization worked to induce conformity in practice to traditional ways of making news, even though many young women journalists felt they had autonomy. One general conclusion to be drawn from this and other evidence is that gender always interacts with the organizational context. The results may be different from case to case. So far, evidence of the direct influence of gender in the newsroom is very limited (Armstrong, 2004; Craft and Wanta, 2004; Steiner, 2009).

Van Zoonen (1988, 1991) has also argued that a more fundamental approach to the construction of gender is needed. She points to basic inconsistencies in the assumption that having more women in the newsroom would change the news (for the better). For one thing, on closer inspection the available evidence does not give good empirical support for this assumption. There have been significant increases in female participation in the workforce (see, for example, Weaver and Wilhoit, 1986, 1996; *Media Studies Journal*, 1993) without any noticeable changes in the 'nature of news'. An American case study by Zoch and van Slyke Turk (1998) examined 1,000 news stories over ten years to see if female reporters were more likely to choose female sources. They found a small tendency in this direction, mainly due to the kinds of stories that women were still more likely to be asked to cover. The theory takes for granted that journalists have enough autonomy to have influence as individuals, whereas this has to be treated as problematic and variable.

There are also divergent views as to what constitutes 'change'. Should the news become 'feminized', or should 'femininity' itself be redefined (perhaps in the direction of masculinity)? The European Commission report cites French research by Erik Neveu that showed 'signs of a feminine tone or slant among women journalists in terms of a tendency to report on "ordinary lives", a less deferential attitude towards authorities, and the use of psychological approaches in the reporting of political lives' (1999: 11). However, this was not evidence of a 'feminine habitus' within journalism, but the result of a circular process following the allocation of certain topics to men or women.

There are two distinct issues here: that of journalistic autonomy versus determination (by external forces or the organizational hierarchy or 'media logic') and that of the desirability of change in the nature of news and the direction which it might take. None of this is an argument against the fact of there being gender differences, or against more equal employment for women, or against change, but the various issues are separate and cannot all be bundled together under the general heading of having more women in news organizations. If the central matter is the way gender is constructed, then a broader approach is needed. It is also the case that broad changes in media, including efforts to attract more female readers to the press and the differentially growing purchasing power of women, are leading to certain 'feminizing' trends, perhaps independent of the number of women employed or their degree of managerial responsibility. Even so, a necessary condition for more equitable treatment of women in news will be the gradual rise of women to positions of power within media organizations.

Role Conflicts and Dilemmas

Not surprisingly, most studies of media organizations reveal many different kinds of latent conflict, based on a variety of factors, although quite often reflecting a tension between the aspirations of 'lower-level' participants and those in control of media. The influence of proprietors on news has already been discussed (pp. 291–2). An

early study by Breed (1955) detailed the (mainly informal) socializing mechanisms that helped to ensure the maintenance of policy. Young reporters would be expected to read the newspaper they worked on and to sit in on editorial conferences. Policy was also learned through informal gossip with colleagues. Deviations were discouraged by feelings of obligation to superiors, by the satisfactions of belonging to the in-group and sometimes by management sanctions and rewards in giving assignments. In general, according to Breed's research, what policy actually was remained covert. Research by Bantz (1985), however, led to the conclusion that the organizational culture of news organizations is intrinsically oriented towards conflict. The relevant factors include: distrust of external sources; the conflict between professional norms and both business and entertainment norms; competition over stories; and the premium in news on conflict.

Returning to the question of conflict based on hierarchy, Muriel Cantor's (1971) study of a group of producers employed in making films for major television networks indicated the existence of three main types. First, there were 'film-makers', mainly younger, well-educated people ambitious to become feature film directors and comparable to the 'professional' category of broadcasters which Burns (1977) singled out. Secondly, there was a group of writer-producers, whose chosen purpose was to make stories with a worthwhile message and to communicate with a wide public. Thirdly, there were older, less well-educated career producers, whose main orientation was to the network and their career within it.

Not surprisingly, the last-mentioned group was least likely to have conflicts with management, since their main aim of reaching the biggest possible audience was shared by the networks. The film-makers, for different reasons, were prepared to accept network goals because they wanted to practise their craft, accumulate money and move on to feature films. It was the writer-producers who came most into conflict with the networks (management) because of their different attitude to the content that they were required to produce. Management wanted a saleable, risk-free product, while the writers still retained some ideals of the craft and wanted to convey a worthwhile message. The chance to reach a large audience was essential to their purpose, but the price, in terms of conforming to commercial goals, was a high one to have to pay.

The lessons of other research on communicators (mainly journalists) seem to lead to a similar conclusion: that where conflict occurs between media organization and employee, it is likely to be where the political tendency or economic self-interest of the organization gets in the way of individual freedom of expression. Flegel and Chaffee (1971) support the view that a devotion to the craft and a 'technical orientation' towards a quality product, requiring co-operation, help to reduce conflict and promote a sense of autonomy. According to Sigelman (1973), the potential problem of conflict on grounds of belief is usually avoided by selective recruitment and self-selection by entrants into media organizations with compatible work environments. Perhaps most significant in news media is the fact that being able to handle the news according to the reigning policy becomes a skill and even a value in itself. The objective of getting the news overrides personal feelings. Presumably, similar processes occur in other media organizations.

Turow (1994) raises the possibility of an increasing potential for internal conflict and even a need for it as a result of more and more concentration of ownership.

In particular, conflicts of interest arise when news events actually concern media themselves (increasingly common) and the media in question happen to belong to the same overall corporation. Professional journalistic values call for freedom to report on controversies that might damage the commercial interests of the parent company, and editorial permission may be denied. Turow's evidence shows that this does happen and that there is already a tendency for 'silent bargains' to be made that encourage conformity and co-operation with overall company policy. A covert reward system exists that stresses caution and loyalty.

It is not clear how much the power of owners and chief editors to influence content is a source of conflict. Gans' (1979: 95) account of several US news media is somewhat ambiguous about the power of corporate executives over reporters. On the one hand, they do make 'policy', conduct frequent and regular briefings, look after the commercial and political interests of the firm, and 'suggest, select and veto news stories whenever they choose'. On the other hand, they do not use their power on a day-to-day basis, and there are countervailing powers that lie with television news producers and editors, if not with individual reporters. Survey evidence tends to support the view that journalists mainly regard themselves as having a reasonable degree of autonomy (e.g. Weaver and Wilhoit, 1986), even if the problem of pressure from 'policy' does arise (see Meyer, 1987; Schultz, 1998). The main kinds of role dilemma that have arisen are summarized in Box 11.6. However, there are indications that the appearance of alternative opportunities for established journalists to operate as independent reporters and commentators by way of the Internet and the resistance on the part of media firms which once had a virtual monopoly on employment is giving rise to a new dilemma. Loyalties to an established title or channel are divided or much weaker and there are new options for autonomy.

Media-occupational role dilemmas 11.6

- Active participatory versus neutral and informational
- Creative and independent versus bureaucratic and routine
- Communicative purpose versus meeting consumer demand
- Personal inclination versus job requirement
- Co-operation versus conflict

Conclusion

As we have seen, media occupations are weakly 'institutionalized' when compared, for instance, with law, medicine or accountancy, and professional success will often depend on the unaccountable ups and downs of public taste or on personal and unique qualities which cannot be imitated or transmitted. Apart from certain performance skills, it is hard to pin down an essential or 'core' media accomplishment. It may be that the freedom, creativity and critical approach that many media personnel still cherish, despite the

bureaucratic setting of their work, are ultimately incompatible with full professionalization in the traditional sense. There are inevitable conflicts at the heart of media work, whether open or latent. Perhaps the most fundamental dilemma is one of freedom versus constraint in an institution whose own ideology places a value on originality and freedom, yet whose organizational setting requires relatively strict control.

Further Reading

Bennett, W.L., Lawrence, R.G. and Livingstone, S. (2007) *When the Press Fails*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

The case in question is the relative failure of the US mainstream press to question the rationale and facts leading up to the invasion on Iraq in 2003. The explanation is found primarily in the position of neutrality adopted by the press in the face of a consensus in the public debate on the part of leading political actors and experts.

Benson, R. and Neveu, E. (eds) (2005) *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Contains a key statement by Bourdieu on the concept of the 'journalistic field' and a set of commentaries by others, focusing especially on the question of journalistic autonomy in relation to political and economic pressures.

Ettema, J.S. and Whitney, D.C. (1982) *Individuals in Mass Organizations*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

A wide-ranging set of studies of different media genres and industries focusing on the potential impact of organizational constraints and pressures on creativity and other quality indicators. Although now old, the same principles apply.

Shoemaker, P.J. and Reese, S.D. (1996) *Mediating the Message*, 2nd edn. New York: Longman.

The book provides a systematic framework of hypotheses about the effects of organizational factors on news production and assembles a large amount of relevant research evidence.

Online Readings

Aday, S., Slivington, M. and Herbert, M. (2005) 'Embedding the truth: a cross-cultural analysis of objectivity and TV coverage of the Iraq war', *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 10 (1): 3–21.

Carlson, M. (2007) 'Order versus access: news search engines and the challenge to traditional journalistic roles', *Media, Culture and Society*, 29 (6): 1014–30.

Deuze, M. (2005) 'Popular and professional ideology: tabloid reporters and editors speak out', *Media, Culture and Society*, 27 (6): 801–22.

Singer, J.B. (2007) 'Contested autonomy: professional and popular claims on journalism norms', *Journalism Studies*, 8 (1): 79–95.