



Graffiti artist Banksy leaves his mark on New Orleans, USA, 2008

MEDIA INFLUENCE

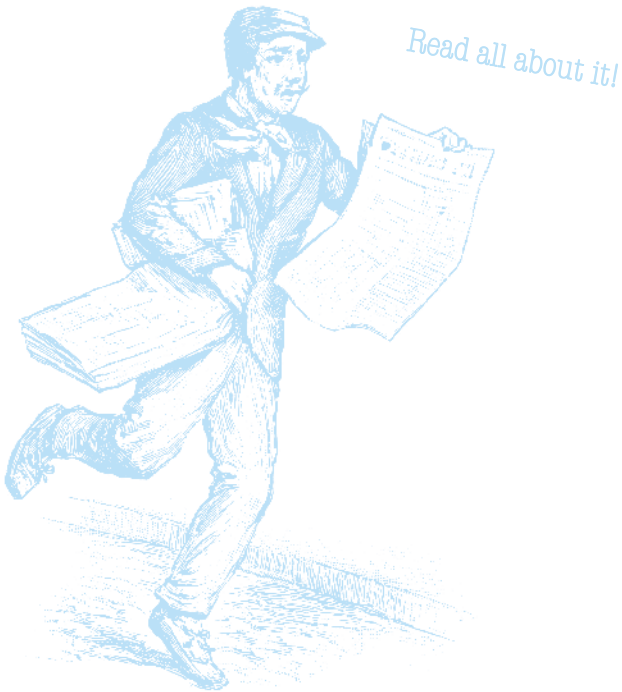
The medium is the message.

Marshall McLuhan, communication theorist in his book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964)

The development of the mass media in the early twentieth century introduced general audiences to numerous channels of communication. Debate has traditionally raged over the power and influence the media may or may not have over audiences. As media students, you need to evaluate the power of the media and try to understand theories of possible effects on the audiences that consume it. These attempts to gauge media influence are called communication theories and models. Each theory claims different effects of the media, or perhaps none at all. This serves to emphasize the importance of understanding the theories as simply that—theories of media influence.

This chapter examines theories of media influence, including the criticisms or limitations identified for each model. It also applies these theories to research and examples, and encourages consideration and evaluation of how audiences respond to information as presented by the media.

COMMUNICATION AND MASS MEDIA



WHAT IS COMMUNICATION?

Communication, in its most basic form, is the process of information exchange between a sender and a receiver. Much of everyday life revolves around numerous forms of media communication such as television, radio, the internet and other new media. But the potential impact and meaning produced in these media forms depends on whether or not the audience can understand the messages being conveyed. Producers of media forms rely on particular audiences to understand the messages being transmitted; otherwise the meaning can be misunderstood, misinterpreted or not received at all.

MASS MEDIA

The term 'mass media' refers to communication being relayed to large groups of people at one time. The term originated in the early twentieth century when media forms such as radio, print and film were mass-produced for wide circulation. Mass media is

characterised by the idea that one text can be read by many, and that a large audience has access to the particular form of communication or entertainment to be able to receive ideas and information. The process of mass communication makes it possible for the same message to be transmitted en masse to a large number of people at the same time.

Mass communication continues today in new media forms. Platforms such as the video sharing website YouTube and other popular social networking websites, enable any ordinary person to become a media creator and publish their texts to a potentially large online audience. Many people have received emails notifying of a peculiar video clip on YouTube or linking to a humorous website. This 'viral' spread of messages is a characteristic of new media, as one person with little more than a computer and an internet connection can achieve the mass audience exposure that previously was only possible for professional media producers with money and influence.



FIGURE 9.1.1 Social media, such as YouTube, allows people to create and distribute their own media texts to a large online audience.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 In your own words, define the term 'mass media'. Provide three examples of mass media in contemporary society.
- 2 Watch a foreign-language film without subtitles (in a language that you are not familiar with) and try to follow what is happening in the film. Write your understanding of the narrative and share your thoughts with a classmate. Discuss how you created meaning from what you saw. What does this tell you about the ways in which people determine meaning from non-verbal signs?
- 3 As a child, you might have played a game in which a verbal message is passed around a circle of people. As players must whisper the message to the person next to them in the circle, the message is usually changed or distorted in some way by the time it reaches the final person, who then repeats the message aloud. This activity reveals how easily a message can be misinterpreted, have important parts missing or become exaggerated as it is passed along the communication chain, away from the original source. Does it matter if parts of a society do not understand messages being sent to them? Why does communication sometimes fail to reach the receiver in its original form?

THE MEDIA EFFECTS TRADITION

With the advancement of communications technology at the beginning of the twentieth century, concerns began to emerge over the potential impact the mass media could have on particular audiences. The power of the press to sway political opinion was the forerunner of research into media effects.

In the early 1920s, the popularity of film and people's widespread access to the radio heralded a new era of mass media. Sociologists and academics became concerned about the social and moral influences these popular new mediums might be having on mass audiences and therefore studies began to explore how people were reacting and responding. At first, these studies followed psychological and sociological approaches to measuring media effects, utilising experiments and statistics. The first studies into the impact of the mass media were based on the belief that the media had a very clear and direct influence on audiences, and were mostly referred to as 'sender-receiver' models. Audiences were considered to be passive, empty vessels that absorbed media messages without question or consideration. These studies were centred around the possible effects that the new media of the time, such film and radio, could have on vulnerable audiences, especially on the young.

Following the Second World War (1939–45), researchers realised that previous media effects theories were ineffective in determining impact and influence on audiences. A more science-focused approach to communication research followed, which heavily modified the sender-receiver models that had previously been so popular. These new approaches acknowledged the audience as an active participant in the communication 'loop' between reader/viewer and text. They provided a more plausible measurement of media texts and audience interpretation, and some of the theories that originated during this time are still considered applicable today.

In the 1960s and 1970s, researchers began to move away from attempting to measure the impact of the media on audience behaviour, focusing more on the potential of the media to indirectly shape culture, values and social boundaries. The media was seen to provide the 'backdrop' of social context, with audiences able to form their own opinions and actively receive texts. It was believed that audiences could both receive and create meaning in equal measure.

The rise of Web 2.0 in the twenty-first century has resulted in social media forming an integral part of many people's media consumption and exposure. Therefore, the notion of the audience engaging interactively with media texts has become an important part of understanding current theories of media effects and influence. Whereas early approaches to media research focused mostly on audience behaviour, contemporary research and theory considers the experience, culture and characteristics of audiences and examines how they interact with, receive and respond to particular texts.

COMMUNICATION THEORIES AND MODELS

Communication theories and models have been devised by researchers and scholars to help people understand the complex relationship between the media and audiences. Communication theories have been evolving since the early twentieth century. They do not provide conclusive evidence that the media does or does not influence audiences; however, they offer various frameworks within which to consider the impact and influence the media has on specific audiences.



FIGURE 9.1.2 Communication theories hypothesise whether audiences are influenced by the media and propose ideas for how audiences interact with and interpret the media.

There are many different communication theories and models, each of which has an important role to play in the history of understanding media effects. For much of the last century, research into media effects centred on the concept of passive or active audiences. Theories focused on how the text affected the audience rather than on how the audience may have interacted with and interpreted the text. More recent communication theories are interested in uncovering the multifaceted relationship the audience has with the media and texts that are produced.

When considering specific communication theories, it is important to take into account their social context; in other words, what was happening in society at the time the theory was developed. For example, the world wars and the feminist movement have influenced the way theorists analysed the media's effect on audiences.

The broad range of communication theories available for discussion pose many conflicting ideas about media influence. It is important to remember that one theory cannot be labelled 'the right one' because a media theory is simply an idea that is applied in an attempt to explain the media's relationship with audiences. The theory itself does not uncover the answer to whether or not the media influences people; it simply helps to understand possible effects on that audience. Theories that were developed during particular periods in the past are still useful today as a way to help explain or understand audiences responses.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 Why are communication theories and models used in discussions about media influence?
- 2 Why did the early 'sender-receiver' models fail to draw any firm conclusions about media influence?
- 3 Define the terms 'passive audience' and 'active audience'. Compare and contrast the two terms.
- 4 Why should social contexts be taken into consideration when studying communication theories?
- 5 Is there one 'right' communication theory? Explain your answer.

EARLY COMMUNICATION MODELS

The first theories of communication were mostly pictorial-based models that explored how messages were sent. These models consisted of diagrams that visually demonstrated the process of communication, and were simplified to include only the basic structures and any relationships within these structures.

One of the earliest communication models, known as Shannon and Weaver's Model, evolved in the mid-twentieth century from a rudimentary understanding of how early telephones worked. Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver were engineers working for Bell Telephone Company. They wanted to ensure that their

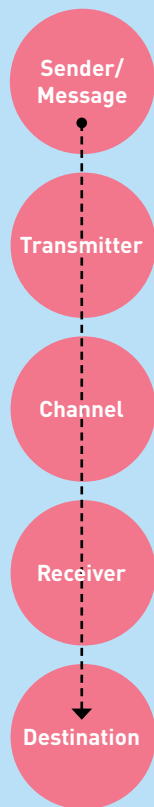


FIGURE 9.1.3 Shannon and Weaver's Model (1949) was based on how telephones operated and originally consisted of five linear elements.

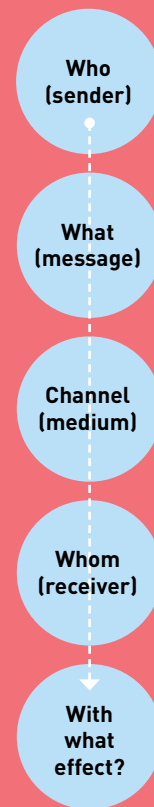


FIGURE 9.1.4 Lasswell's Model (1948) was the first to consider the effect on the receiver within the communication process.

equipment was creating the best environment for sound to transmit clearly. Their model had five linear elements:

- an information source or 'sender' (produces the message)
- a transmitter (encodes the message)
- a channel (adapts the message for transmission)
- a receiver (decodes the message)
- a destination (where the message is received).

This model is a linear process that suggests that information travels from the sender to the receiver in a straight line. However, this model of communication has significant limitations, largely because it is impossible for everyone to receive and understand a message in the exact same way it was sent to them without 'interference'. Therefore, a sixth element, noise, was later introduced to account for messages failing to be received intact due to factors such as the receiver's own knowledge, attitudes and interpretation.

This basic model paved the way for similar ideas about the transmission of messages, in particular Lasswell's Model in 1948. Harold Lasswell was a communication theorist who suggested that in order

to understand specific stages of communication, people needed to ask the question: 'who says what in which channel to whom and with what effect?' Lasswell's Model was the first of its kind to suggest there may be an *effect* on the receiver, rather than simply focusing on the delivery of a message to a receiver.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 Explain Shannon and Weaver's Model in your own words, using examples to support your answer. What are some of the model's strengths and weaknesses?
- 2 Compare and contrast Shannon and Weaver's and Lasswell's Models? Why might these models be important when thinking about the historical context of communication theory?
- 3 The popularity of film in the 1920s influenced sociologists to investigate how this new media might harm audiences. Are there any examples of current new media being criticised as potentially 'harmful' for audiences? What is the main concern of critics about this media form?

CULTURAL EFFECTS THEORIES: WHAT THE MEDIA *DOES* TO AUDIENCES



THE HYPODERMIC/BULLET THEORY

The Hypodermic theory, also known as the Bullet theory, originated in the USA in the 1920s. The Payne Fund Studies Group (USA) and the Frankfurt School (Germany) considered the media to be a very powerful institution. This view developed out of the popularity and assumed power that radio broadcasters began to have on their audiences, who were thought to be 'sitting ducks', unable to distinguish fact from fantasy.

This theory suggests that audiences are passive consumers who are not aware of the media's effects on them—it was believed that messages were sent straight to the audience like an injection from a needle, without any interference or negotiated meaning. The Hypodermic theory was not scientifically tested; rather it was based on anecdotal observations and assumptions made about audience response. Despite its lack of research, the Hypodermic theory was extremely influential in its time and continues to linger in public consciousness and debates about media influence.

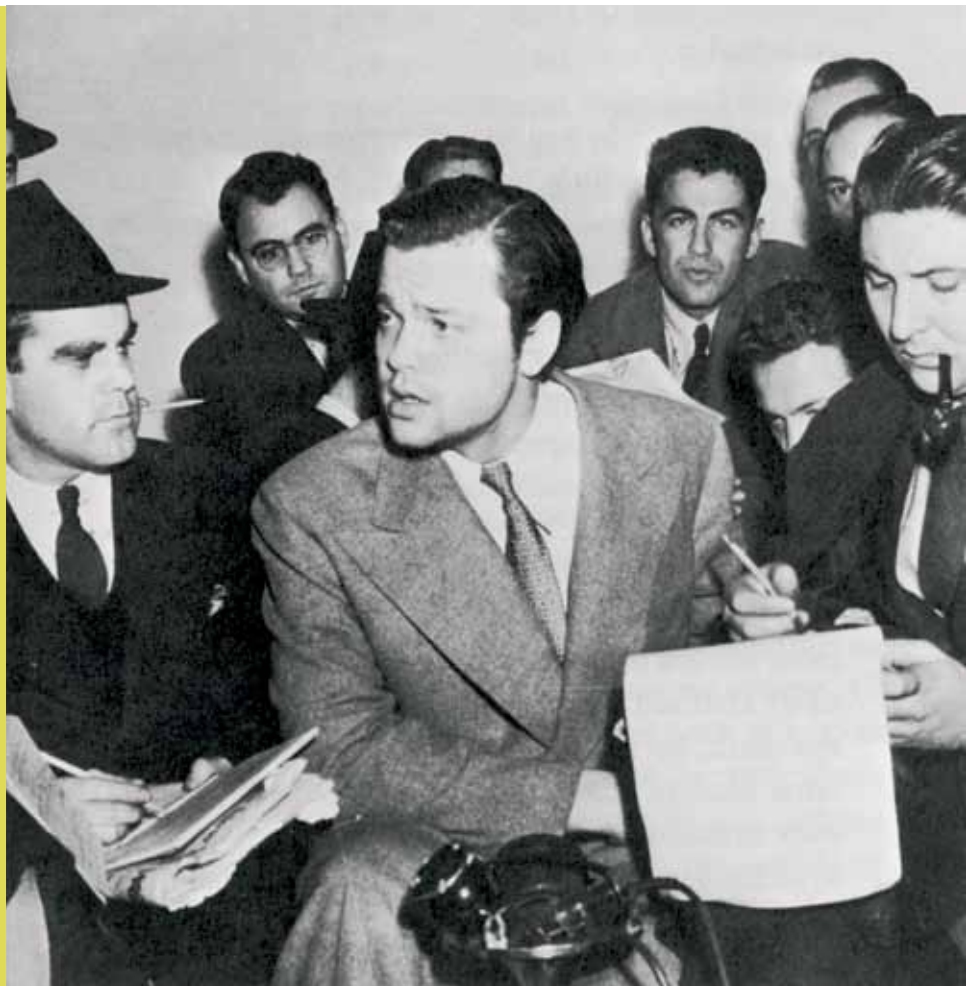
THE WAR OF THE WORLDS

In the 1920s and 1930s, radio was arguably the most popular medium across most of the Western world. It was a relatively inexpensive form of communication technology and, as a shared experience, radio had the potential to reach a wide audience simultaneously.

The Hypodermic theory has long been associated with the infamous *War of the Worlds* radio dramatisation, orchestrated by Orson Welles on 30 October 1938. For this CBS radio broadcast, Welles adapted H. G. Wells' novel *The War of the Worlds* into a radio play. Under his direction, the play was written and performed so it would sound like a contemporary news broadcast about an alien invasion from the planet Mars, a technique that, presumably, was intended to heighten the dramatic effect.

At the beginning of the broadcast, there was a brief disclaimer that the segment to follow was going to be a dramatisation of the original story; however, a popular radio show of the time (which was on a different channel) ran overtime by five minutes, so many listeners who tuned in late did not hear

FIGURE 9.2.1 In the days that followed the broadcast, Orson Welles faced public outrage and condemnation, but insisted he did not intend to cause mass hysteria with his radio dramatisation of *The War of the Worlds*.



this explanation. As the play unfolded, without any commercial breaks, the program was interrupted by fake news bulletins reporting from real locations around the USA, featuring 'reporters' fearfully describing horrific sights to the listeners. As the audience listened to the simulated news broadcasts, some people concluded that the program was in fact a news account of a real invasion from Mars. People packed the roads, hid in cellars and loaded their guns, in an attempt to defend themselves against the alien invasion.

While it is still a topic of debate as to how many people actually responded to the play in panic, the fact that some people reacted extremely raised many questions about the impact of new mediums, such as radio, on audiences. In the days that followed the broadcast, there was strong public indignation towards Welles. At the time, he protested his innocence, claiming it was an accidental and unfortunate incident. However, many years later, Welles allegedly admitted to conducting the play in a realistic way in order to deliberately evoke a response from his audience.

It is easy to dismiss Welles' *The War of the Worlds* incident as outdated sensationalism and assume that audiences in the 1930s were more susceptible to media influence than today. However, in March 2010, a similar event occurred in the sovereign state of Georgia, when a local television program broadcast a fake news segment about being invaded by Russia. Footage of a previous invasion was re-edited and broadcast as a new conflict, and even though there was a disclaimer at the start of the program, panic ensued and the country's mobile phone network collapsed as people desperately tried to reach their loved ones and seek out information. Three people died as a result of the panic.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 Explain the Hypodermic/Bullet theory in your own words, using examples to support your answer. What are some of the theory's strengths and weaknesses?
- 2 What contributing factors do you think may have influenced people's panicked reaction to Orson Welles' radio dramatisation of *The War of the Worlds*?

- 3 In today's media-saturated society, some people may find it difficult to believe that Welles' radio dramatisation of *The War of the Worlds* could have had such an extreme impact on US audiences. However, consider the advertising buzz created by films such as *The Blair Witch Project* (1999). When the film was first released, many people believed it was a real documentary, which added to the film's popularity and hype. Can you think of any other media examples that have used the illusion of reality to make an impact on audiences?
- 4 In 2007, Australian radio announcer Alan Jones was found to have breached the commercial radio code for comments he made regarding the Cronulla race riots in New South Wales, in 2005. The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) ruled that he 'broadcast material that was likely to encourage violence or brutality'. Research this example and interpret the audience response to Jones' comments based on the Hypodermic/Bullet theory of media influence.

PROPAGANDA AND WAR

Documented media effects examples, such as the reaction to Orson Welles' radio dramatisation of *The War of the Worlds*, prompted media theorists to consider if the media itself or rather the transmission of particular information, such as propaganda, could actually persuade large numbers of people to behave or think in a certain way.

Propaganda played a significant role in the rise of Adolf Hitler in Germany during the Second World War. Germans were only allowed to read, view and hear what the Nazis wanted them to read, view and hear, which ensured that the image of Hitler and ideologies of his Nazi Party became prevalent throughout Germany. Joseph Goebbels, Minister of Propaganda and National Enlightenment for Germany from 1933–45, commented, 'The essence of propaganda consists in winning people over to an idea so sincerely, so vitally, that in the end they succumb to it utterly and can never escape from it.'

The Allies were equally prolific with their Second World War media campaigns. Combining news with entertainment, newsreels were broadcast to cinema-going audiences before the feature film. Newsreels were blatantly optimistic and cheerful in their tone to garner support for the war effort. Conversely, a significant number of films were produced that highlighted the dangers of war, explicitly reminding audiences of the importance and necessity of war. *Kokoda Front Line* (1942), a feature-length documentary made by Cinesound,

was the first Australian production to win an Oscar. The documentary's realism was intended to raise awareness of the gruelling nature of war and, in turn, spark renewed interest and support for Australia's fight against the Japanese army.

While Germany's use of propaganda dominates popular knowledge due to its sinister intent and horrific outcome, propaganda has been used by many countries and is still being used today.

CRITICISMS OF THE HYPODERMIC/BULLET THEORY

The Hypodermic theory suggests that all audiences respond to media texts in exactly the same way. However, not all of Germany supported Hitler's ideology, and at no stage did a majority of Germans vote for the Nazi Party. Many people did perceive Orson Welles' *The War of the Worlds* broadcast as truth, but not every person in the USA listening to the broadcast fled for their lives in fear of a Martian attack.

Almost a century after it was initially proposed, the Hypodermic theory persists as a benchmark of how the media influences behaviour. However, it is criticised as being too simplistic to adequately explain media effects.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 Examine the example of war propaganda aimed at an Australian audience in Figure 9.2.2. Analyse the representation for meaning. How does the image try to influence the audience? Look at the use of location, costume and text.
- 2 German war propaganda was also transmitted through film. There are a number of well-known examples including Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1935) and Fritz Hippler's *The Eternal Jew* (1940) that were shot to appear as documentaries. Watch parts of either of these films and discuss with the class how story and production elements are used to position the audience to align with the ruling Nazi Party.
- 3 Using the internet, find an example of contemporary propaganda from the last twenty years. Share your example with the class and analyse how its story and production elements are used to influence people to think a certain way. Did you have trouble finding a recent example of propaganda? If so, why do you think this is?

*A United
Fighting Mad'
Australia -
can never be
Enslaved.*

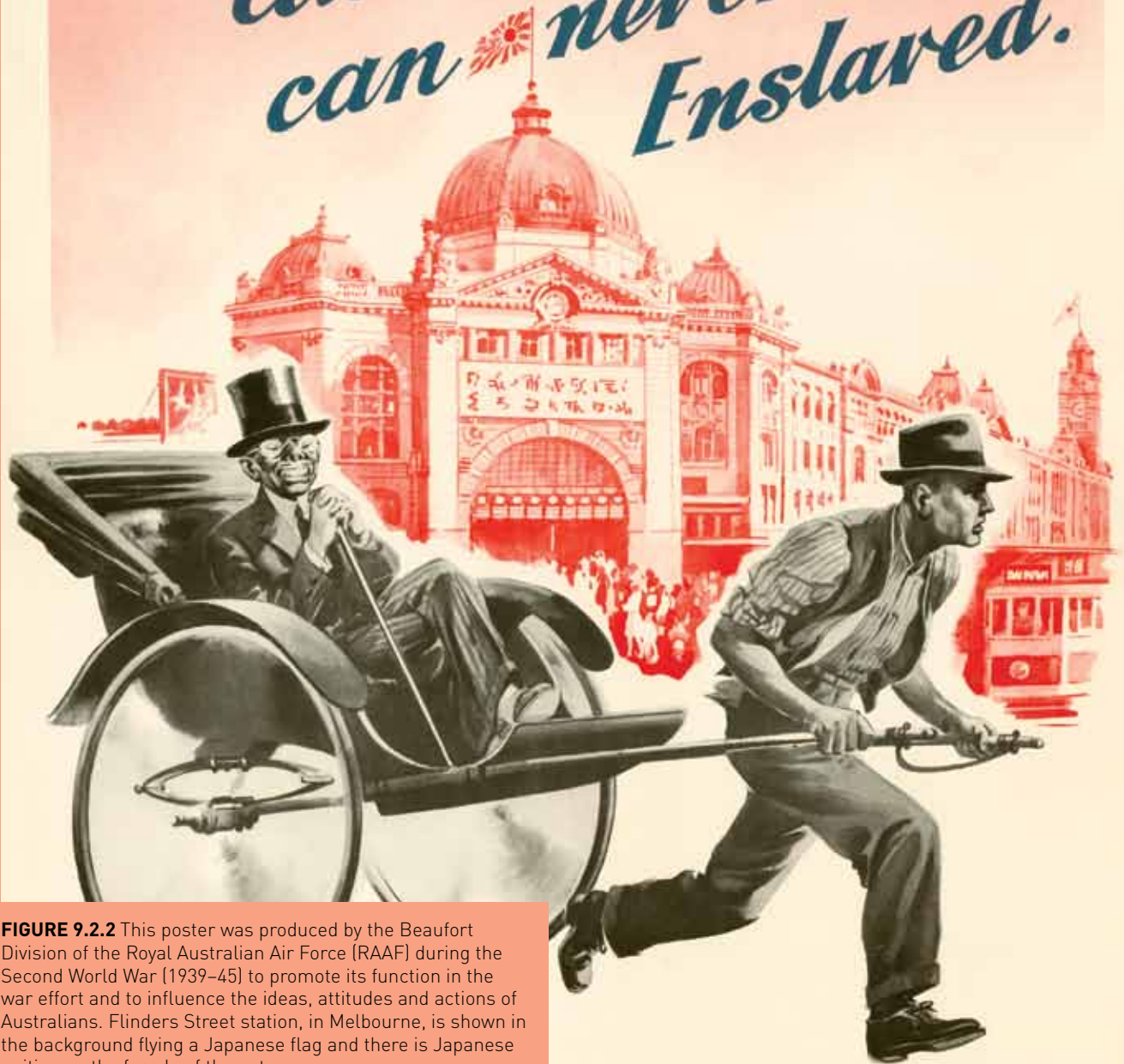


FIGURE 9.2.2 This poster was produced by the Beaufort Division of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) during the Second World War (1939–45) to promote its function in the war effort and to influence the ideas, attitudes and actions of Australians. Flinders Street station, in Melbourne, is shown in the background flying a Japanese flag and there is Japanese writing on the facade of the entrance.

BEAUFORTS - ARE THE KEY TO VICTORY.
YOU CAN HASTEN VICTORY BY JOINING THE BEAUFORT ANTI WASTE CAMPAIGN.



FIGURE 9.2.3 Some have claimed that the support shown by popular US television host Oprah Winfrey for Barack Obama's 2008 US presidential campaign was instrumental in his election victory. Lazarsfeld's Two-Step Flow theory would suggest that Oprah's approval and endorsement of Obama as a desirable future president held greater influence for voters than his 'Change we can believe in' slogans.

LAZARSFELD'S TWO-STEP FLOW THEORY

In the 1940s, sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld set out to disprove the largely negative effects of mass communication on audiences as described by supporters of the Hypodermic theory. Lazarsfeld's ideas about media effects are particularly relevant to the use of propaganda and are in opposition to the Hypodermic theory's claim of audiences as passive consumers. Lazarsfeld's Two-Step Flow theory emphasises the active participation of individuals in the communication process.

Lazarsfeld's research included investigating the effects of political mass communication. After reviewing US election campaigns, Lazarsfeld proposed the idea that the general public was not influenced by overt advertising or catchy slogans distributed by the media. Instead, people were more likely to be influenced by certain peers that he labelled 'opinion leaders', public figures who are more adept at interpreting media messages and passing on their interpretations to others.

USES AND GRATIFICATION THEORY

The Uses and Gratification theory originated in the USA in the 1940s as an extension to Lazarsfeld's ideas about audience interaction with the media. The theory largely came about as a means to debunk the Hypodermic theory of media effects. Harold Lasswell, a member of the Chicago School of Sociology and an advocate of the Uses and Gratification theory, theorised that the media served four functions:

- surveillance (keeping people informed by providing information and news)
- correlation (selecting and interpreting information to distribute)
- entertainment (presenting material that is relaxing and fills leisure time)
- cultural transmission for society and individuals (communicating norms, values and rules of society).

Blumler, Katz and Gurevitch researched the theory further in 1974 and expanded on Lasswell's original functions to include emotional release from problems, companionship and value reinforcement in personal identity.

The Uses and Gratification theory centres around two focus questions: 'Why do people use the media?' and 'What do they use it for?'

The Uses and Gratification theory suggests that the media has no power over audiences. Rather audiences are highly active in their media usage, determine the media they wish to consume and are able to create their own individual meanings.

Uses and Gratification theorists suggest that audiences have uses for particular forms of media, and through a process of selection and omission, use their chosen media for personal gratification. An individual's choice of media may depend on their mood, the time of day, their need to be informed, entertained or to escape reality. For example, a person may decide to read the newspaper every day as a means of keeping up to date with current affairs. By doing this, they feel more confident when talking about issues with their peers, thus fulfilling their need to be knowledgeable on particular topics.

The Uses and Gratification theory is mostly based on quantitative research such as television ratings, which provide media organisations with statistical feedback on how audiences are responding to particular texts. If a television series rates poorly, this has a direct impact on advertising revenues and could lead to the series being cancelled, proving that the audience has the power to dictate what the media provides for its gratification. Tabloid news and current affairs programs that rate well often proclaim that they 'give the public what it wants' as a means for justifying sensationalist reports on scandals and dodgy deals. If a television series delivers high ratings, it is making money for the network while serving a function for the television audience, thus inspiring media organisations to invest in similar programming.

Recently, the Uses and Gratification theory has been linked to the rise of Web 2.0 and social media. File sharing across the internet and social media interfaces such as Facebook® and YouTube are examples of how audiences can customise and choose the media they want to share or consume.

SOAP OPERAS

A major focus for research on why and how people watch television has been the investigation of the soap opera genre. Watching television soap operas fulfils the objectives of the Uses and Gratification theory. If we consider the target audience for daytime soaps to be those working within the home, soap operas offer this audience a break from the domestic routine and provide an entertaining reward for work. They

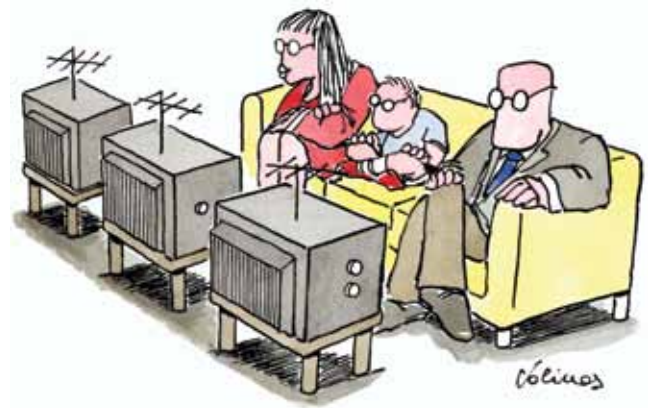


FIGURE 9.2.4 The Uses and Gratification theory suggests that audiences actively use the media for their own purposes.

also serve to fulfil individual needs by, for example, providing a way to deal with loneliness. They depict an escapist fantasy that enables cathartic identification and involvement with the soap's characters. Soaps offer audiences a way to feel involved in a community that in reality is unavailable to them.

Did you know that the term 'soap opera' originated in the 1930s as a way to describe serial drama radio programs? These programs were sponsored by soap companies and specifically targeted the female audience who were believed to be looking for escape from domestic boredom and isolation.

CRITICISMS OF THE USES AND GRATIFICATION THEORY

There are a number of criticisms of this theory, mostly due to its view of the media. In its time, the Uses and Gratification theory was seen as being too functionalist, meaning that the theory views the media as serving a purpose by being useful to audiences. In seeing the media in a largely positive way, the theory tends to ignore the potential negative impact the media might have on audiences, even if it is essentially meeting user needs.

Another criticism of the theory concerns the idea that people use the media consciously by deliberately choosing what they consume. This does not allow for the fact that audiences often consume media mindlessly and without direct purpose, such as when channel surfing and waiting for television commercials to pass. Television is often a source of 'background noise' in households—just because the television is on, does not mean that someone is always watching it. If an audience has no genuine 'use' for the media, how can the theory be applied?

The theory has also been heavily criticised for its research techniques. Although it was tested on audiences, the Uses and Gratification theory uses quantitative techniques to assess the audience's use of the media text. Quantitative methods include objective measures such as surveys and questionnaires, but do not allow for direct questioning of the audience or elaboration on specific choices (qualitative research). The quantitative research method is limited because it relies purely on statistics, and these results may not adequately reflect the complex relationship between the media and the audience.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 Explain the Uses and Gratification theory in your own words, using examples to support your answer. What are some of the theory's strengths and weaknesses?
- 2 Watch television for a minimum of an hour and take notes recording how many times you change the channel and why. Compare your results with a classmate and discuss your findings in terms of the Uses and Gratification theory.
- 3 Have you ever completed a quiz in a magazine and guessed the sequence of required answers, then modified your response to get a certain outcome? If so, does this mean the quiz is still an accurate representation of your answers?
- 4 Tabloid news and current affairs television programs heavily rely on ratings to justify their content by claiming they 'give the public what it wants'. Discuss whether you think this is true, or if you believe there are other reasons why people watch these types of programs.

REINFORCEMENT THEORY

For the first half of the twentieth century, media research swung between two extremes: that the media caused a passive, 'hypodermic-style' reaction in audiences, and that audiences were unaffected by the media and actively used it for their personal gratification.

The 1960s marked a turning point for communication research; up to this point, researchers were concerned with what effects the media had on audiences. As television became popular, theorists began to think differently about audiences, and a focus on interpretive and social responses to the media began to emerge. In 1960, sociologist Joseph Klapper wrote an influential book called *The Effects of Mass Communication*, in which he described

'emerging generalisations' based on his research into the effects of mass communication and the media. Klapper proposed that the media has very little power to shape or influence public opinion because audiences are active, texts are open to interpretation and these media texts actually work to reinforce existing opinions.



FIGURE 9.2.5 The Reinforcement theory suggests that people are more likely to be influenced by their family and peers before the media.

Klapper researched where audiences got their opinions and how they formed their values. From this, he theorised that 'socialising agents' such as family, peer group, schooling, occupation, religion and social class are far more influential than the media. He called this theory the Reinforcement theory, and he argued that the media simply reinforces what the consumer already believes about the world and society. However, for the media to actually influence an audience, the audience must be presented with an issue that its socialising agents have yet to be exposed to. In Klapper's opinion, the media does not have the power to influence audiences as much as the socialising agents; but in special circumstances when incidents or issues are new or previously unheard of, the media can have the power to shape and influence opinion by reporting and presenting particular issues in a certain way.

The Reinforcement theory can be applied to political campaigns, especially national elections. It is argued that many people have pre-existing beliefs in regards to politics and, generally speaking, most people have a good idea of which political party they will vote for early on in a campaign. Klapper would suggest these beliefs are instilled via peer groups and family members, with many voters aligning themselves with a political figure or party the same way their parents or family members do. Beck and Jennings, authors of the article 'Family Traditions, Political Periods, and the Development of Partisan Orientations' (1991),

believe that two of the most important influences on the development of an adult's political orientation are their parents' political tendencies and the pressures of society during the time they enter the electorate.

Liz Sidoti, a US journalist, reported that a month before the 2008 US presidential election, only one-fifth of voters were unsure who they would vote for. Political campaigns are largely aimed at these undecided and 'swing' voters, because they are most likely to be persuaded by media coverage, rather than the majority of the population, who tend to have their voting choices influenced by those around them, and not the media.

CRITICISMS OF THE REINFORCEMENT THEORY

One of the main criticisms of the Reinforcement theory surrounds the idea that people's socialising agents are culturally grouped. For example, your friends and family are likely to be of the same socio-economic status as you, so they would probably have the same exposure to particular issues and ideas as you also. This would lead to people forming particular and unvaried opinions about what they consume in the media. An audience may be open and active in its interpretation of the media, but, if as Klapper suggests, our peers and family influence us before the media, from where do our peers and family get their opinions?

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 Explain the Reinforcement theory in your own words, using examples to support your answer. What are some of the theory's strengths and weaknesses?
- 2 The 1960s was a time of great social and cultural change. How do you think this influenced the ways theorists, such as Joseph Klapper, went about their research?
- 3 Consider the last time you learnt something new from the media. Has that information shaped your knowledge of that subject? Discuss your experiences using examples.
- 4 Look in your local newspaper and try to find stories on issues you have no prior knowledge of. Synthesise the information you can gather from these articles and share your findings with the class. Then do a quick survey of your communication process: did your summary reinforce to the class information they already knew, or did you shape their knowledge of something they had never considered?

AGENDA-SETTING FUNCTION THEORY

After claims made by Joseph Klapper that the media has little power over audiences other than to influence them when a new issue is raised, in the 1970s, media theorists began re-exploring the idea that the media may have some power to influence general public opinion.

Political scientist Bernard Cohen proposed that although the media is not able to dictate to audiences 'what to think', it can dictate 'what to think about'.

The Agenda-Setting Function theory suggests that the media has the power to set the agenda or terms of reference for any social, political or economic issue. The media can make audiences think in certain ways about particular people, situations and current affairs, depending on the angle from which the information is reported.

The media's ability to set the agenda on important societal issues is due to a number of factors, including the power of media creators to select and omit information 'on behalf' of the audience. In news reporting, the media has the ability to give one side of the story far more prominence than another, depending on social, political and economic agendas. The media therefore does not reflect reality, but it can filter and shape it in the eyes of the audience.

The most prolific researchers of the Agenda-Setting Function theory were journalism professors Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw. Their initial research focused on the 1968 US election campaign between the presidential candidates Richard Nixon and Hubert Humphrey. They discovered that there was a correlation between how often and to what extent the media covered a news story, and the degree to which the general public thought the issue was of importance. Their theory suggested that if an item runs at the top of the news bulletin, or appears on the front page of the newspaper, it signals to the audience that it is newsworthy and hence, a very important story.

One of the earliest and most influential examples of research carried out in relation to the Agenda-Setting Function theory was conducted by The Glasgow Media Group in 1976. The Group researched what stories received top billing in news bulletins, what was delegated to second, and so on. Its studies showed that news bulletins do have priorities, which are indicated through the importance stories are given in the running order of the broadcast. Audiences recognise that the first story of a news bulletin is

considered to be the most important incident that happened for the day. Audiences know this because news reporters have set this agenda since reporting began in the nineteenth century. What a society sets as its news also reflects the values and attitudes of that society.

The theory evolved further in the 1990s when McCombs continued his research into agenda setting in the media. While in the 1970s it was argued that the media could not tell people what to think, but could tell them what to think about, McCombs revised this approach and argued that the media actually did have the power to shape public thought through a process called framing. Framing is said to occur through the use of selection, exclusion, emphasis and elaboration. In this way, the media can set the agenda by drawing attention to certain aspects of a story. Also known as the 'transfer of salience', this idea suggests that the media can purposely manipulate an issue to heighten its importance and make it a talking point for the public.

At the turn of the century, McCombs and Shaw revised Cohen's classic and often quoted synthesis of the Agenda-Setting Function theory. They argued that in the twenty-first century the media may not only tell people 'what to think about', it may also tell people *how* and *what* to think about, and perhaps even what to do about it.

CRITICISMS OF THE AGENDA-SETTING FUNCTION THEORY

From the 1970s to the 1990s, there were many empirical studies that looked at the ways the media attempted to set the popular agenda. However, most of these focused on the ways the media attempted to shape the audience's opinion rather than how the media may have affected audience behaviour.

Criticisms also focus on the idea that the theory presupposes audiences to be knowledgeable, aware of and interested in contemporary issues, therefore making them sceptical of the media's ability to manipulate messages. Audiences use the media in a variety of ways and may only pay intermittent attention to the media, meaning the attempt to set the agenda will be partially lost or misinterpreted to those who do not know of the issue or are simply not interested.

While the Agenda Setting-Function theory has a secure place in the media effects tradition, it does not conclusively determine the extent to which an audience may or may not be influenced by the media.

Images of the US World Trade Center terrorist attack on 11 September 2001 have become ingrained in public consciousness through constant repetition. The images are distressing, confronting and at times incredibly violent. Most people can recall seeing the image of the plane hitting the second tower from many different angles. This use of repetition reinforces to the viewer the horror of the acts and the human tragedy associated with those images, and is one of the basic principles of the Agenda-Setting Function theory.



FIGURE 9.2.6 The cover of Melbourne newspaper the *Herald Sun* on 13 September 2001, reporting on events related to the US World Trade Center terrorist attack on 11 September 2001. How has this cover set the agenda?

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 Explain the Agenda-Setting Function theory in your own words, using examples to support your answer. What are some of the theory's strengths and weaknesses?
- 2 It could be said that all news is biased in one way or another. Do you believe that news reports are obliged to tell the truth and convey all information available to the audience?
- 3 Analyse Figure 9.2.6 for agenda-setting techniques. Consider the images that have been chosen for the front page of the newspaper, along with the size, colours and positioning of the images. Analyse the use of text in the same way. Do you think the treatment of this front page sets a particular agenda? Explain your answer.
- 4 Compare the news reports from a commercial television channel with those from a community or government-funded channel. Analyse how the news is prioritised, edited and presented. Does it use voice-overs, particular images or repeated footage and, if so, to what effect? Does one channel give more priority to certain items? What are they? In your opinion, which channel reported with an equal perspective of 'both sides of the story'? Explain your answer.

CULTIVATION THEORY

While certain theories focused on the media as a whole, the Cultivation theory, devised by Professor George Gerbner in the 1970s, has a very specific focus on television. At this time, television as a medium was extremely popular and, some argued, also extremely powerful. Gerbner saw television as a highly powerful shaper of modern society, particularly as it had the ability to be watched by the same audience for hours on end. He believed television to be a 'storyteller', a medium able to shape ideas in society about what is important and what is right.

While many researchers focused on how television violence could be imitated by young viewers (e.g. Bandura's 'BoBo Dolls' experiment) Gerbner looked beyond this and explored how television encourages, or cultivates, a particular belief about society. For almost twenty years, Gerbner researched his theory, using mostly longitudinal and quantitative research to monitor the amount of violence on US television screens. Gerbner believed that the effects of repeated television viewing took years to slowly develop and shape opinions about society, so his findings often took a long time to be published.

In one study, Gerbner found that there was an average of five traumatic incidents for every hour of television viewed, with children's programming averaging twenty incidents per hour. When an argument is made to support the idea that the media is violent, Gerbner's research statistic that 'by the time a child graduates from high school they will have watched 13 000 violent deaths on television' is often cited in support of this claim.

Gerbner's research moved beyond counting acts of dramatic violence and made some very interesting observations about the representations of minority groups on US television. During the period of his study, half of all people shown on television were 'white' middle-class men (descended from European colonists), and young people made up only 10 per cent of the representations. Women were seen only a third of the time of men; African Americans and other non-white groups were seen less than their Caucasian counterparts, and representations of the elderly were almost non-existent. Gerbner also reported that US television featured young people and the elderly being attacked and/or killed more often than middle-aged people, with minority groups being physically assaulted and killed more than whites.

If we take into consideration that the Cultivation theory is said to promote a particular way of thinking about the world, Gerbner's research would suggest that minority groups, the young and the elderly would have their beliefs about society shaped by repeated television viewing. These groups were not represented in the majority of programs, and when they were on screen, they were portrayed as victims and as vulnerable figures. Gerbner believed these audiences were most susceptible to being cultivated towards seeing society as a violent and threatening place.



FIGURE 9.2.7 The Cultivation theory suggests that children consume large amounts of violent television. This exposure cultivates particular responses to the real world.

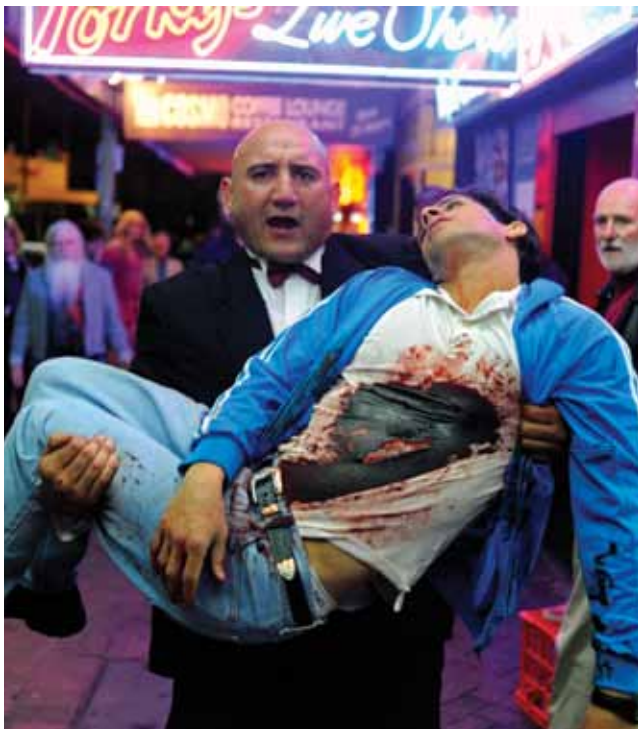


FIGURE 9.2.8 Under the Cultivation theory, television series, such as *Underbelly*, are believed to cultivate fears that society is violent and dangerous.

It is interesting to note the current abundance of crime-related television series. Series such as *Law and Order*, *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* and Australia's own *Underbelly*, are extremely popular with audiences and portray violent crime in dramatic realism. Do you think these programs encourage audiences to think the world is a scary and dangerous place?

CRITICISMS OF THE CULTIVATION THEORY

Gerbner's theory is heavily criticised for being too reliant on statistics and for denigrating audiences as little more than mindless viewers of screen violence. The Cultivation theory recalls the way media researchers once thought about people as passive audiences, and does not acknowledge the active role the audience plays in choosing the media it wishes to consume.

Gerbner's definition of screen violence focuses on the act (or threat) of killing or causing bodily harm to someone, and does not include verbal or emotional abuse. The heart of the theory's problem lies in defining violence, which is especially difficult to measure and classify. What one person finds violent, the next might find amusing or silly.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 Explain the Cultivation theory in your own words, using examples to support your answer. What are some of the theory's strengths and weaknesses?
- 2 How are teenagers represented in the Australian media? Do you think that the media cultivates adults to perceive teenagers in a particular way? Justify your response with examples.

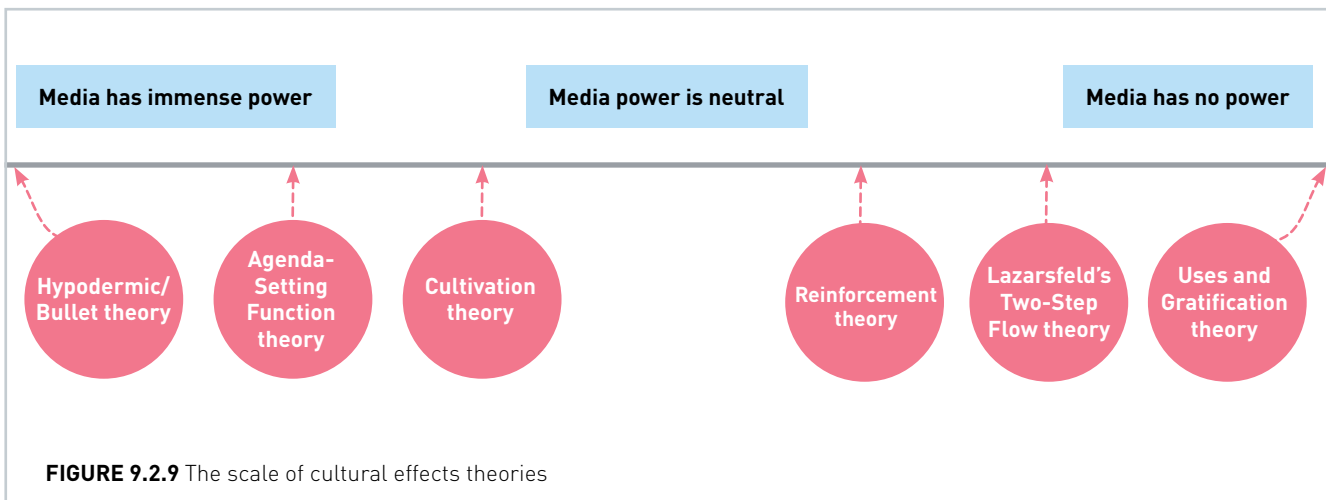


FIGURE 9.2.9 The scale of cultural effects theories

RECEPTION THEORIES: WHAT THE AUDIENCE DOES WITH THE MEDIA



There are no facts, only interpretations of facts.

Friedrich Nietzsche, German philosopher

In the 1970s and 1980s, a different way of thinking about the mass media began to emerge. There was a shift away from trying to measure what the media *does to* audiences and a greater focus on what the audience *does with* the media. The idea that audiences were passive and absorbed the media without conscious thought or interaction was discarded and media effects research put more emphasis on the audience than ever before. Audiences were no longer seen to be masses of faceless groups, and research methods were devised to enable researchers to interview and observe individuals in detail.

Theorists began to examine the process of 'reading' a media text. French philosopher Jacques Derrida suggested that, despite audiences being presented with the one image or text, everyone within that audience could potentially have a completely different 'reading' of a text.

SEMIOTICS

Academic research into the power of symbols and signs became very popular in the 1970s. This study, called semiotics, which means 'the study of signs', places great importance on the meaning people derive from signs, and where people get their understanding of these meanings.

In very basic terms, semiotics is about how a message is 'encoded' by the sender and then 'decoded' by the receiver. While this idea poses some similarities to Shannon and Weaver's Model of communication discussed earlier in the chapter, semiotics goes further than this and focuses on the meanings that arise when the receiver decodes the message.

The Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure defined a sign as being composed of a 'signifier', which is the form a sign or symbol takes, and the 'signified', which is the concept or meaning it represents. The 'sign' then, is the combination of the signifier and the signified.

Semiotics is really not as confusing as it sounds! For example, when you see someone wearing a pink ribbon that has been fashioned into a loop and fastened with a safety pin, what do you think it means? Of course, it is the internationally recognised sign for breast cancer awareness. In this case, the signifier is the pink satin ribbon, and more specifically the way it has been looped carries meaning. The signified is therefore 'breast cancer', so the sign is that seeing this ribbon makes people more aware of breast cancer as an illness. In many ways, what most people refer to as a 'brand', semiotics would refer to as signs.



FIGURE 9.3.1 The pink ribbon is recognised all over the world as a symbol of breast cancer awareness.

SEMIOTIC CONSTRUCTIVIST THEORY

Semiotic theorists believe that there are multiple factors involved in the message encoding and decoding process, including understanding specific codes that work like a framework. This framework is both learnt and shared by audiences so that signs (via images and language) are commonly understood. There are codes for different cultures, colours, languages, genders and media genres. According to semiotic theorists, the automatic and unconscious use of these codes dominates people's experience of the media, with this meaning functioning on a symbolic and ideological level.

Probably the most well-known semiotic theorist was Roland Barthes who looked at the role signs play in culture and mass media. Barthes believed that signs in the media could reinforce the dominant values of society through their repetition and representation. He proposed that a culture's signs reflect how the culture wants to be seen—even if the representations are unfair or 'wrong'. He argued that the media can make parts of a culture appear to be natural, inevitable and eternal, and he called his theory an explanation of 'myth'.

The Semiotic Constructivist theory is based on principles of semiotics. The theory takes what the sign literally depicts as the denotation, and the meaning people attach to the sign is called a connotation. The theory suggests that meanings arise from the interaction of a text with a reader and that audiences can have many different interpretations of

the same text. Therefore, when an audience interprets a text, it understands certain signs or codes in the text depending on particular cultural norms that are relevant to the society at the time.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 Explain the Semiotic Constructivist theory in your own words, using examples to support your answer. What are some of the theory's strengths and weaknesses?
- 2 Consider possible denotations for the following signs and write what you believe are their connotations. For example, 'red rose': denotations include plant, petals, thorns etc.; connotations include romance, love, passion etc.
 - a Red sports car
 - b Bride wearing white
 - c Skull and crossbones
 - d A swastika
 - e Red fingernails

Compare your answers with the class and discuss why there are multiple denotations and connotations for the same signs. Remember to consider different cultural backgrounds when you discuss meaning.

BAUDRILLARD AND SIMULACRA

Barthes, semiotic approach to understanding cultural signs paved the way for French cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulacra and hyperreality. The audience enters into what Baudrillard called simulacra: false reality that is made up of representations so convincing that they have replaced what was once real. For example, have you ever visited a theme park that replicated a street, a landscape or an event? Main Street USA at Disneyland in Anaheim, California is a famous example of simulacra. What is presented there seems so real and so perfect that it makes people want to 'buy in' to the Disney branded fantasy in order to feel like they are part of the hyperreal Disney world.

There are also examples of simulacra in Australia. Victoria's popular tourist attraction Sovereign Hill is a simulated representation of what the Victorian goldfields in the late 1800s may have looked like. Visitors walk down the main street, look in typical shops and houses of the era and even talk to people in period costume who 'live' there. However, Sovereign Hill, as it looks today, never existed. It is a collage



FIGURE 9.3.2 Disneyland's Main Street USA in Anaheim, California can be analysed as an example of Baudrillard's concept of simulacra and hyperreality.



FIGURE 9.3.3 *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003) is an example of a film text that is heavily influenced by Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality.

of the real and the imagined; some buildings are actually from the era, and some are constructed from drawings and descriptions. Sovereign Hill serves as a reference to the gold rush hyperreality, even though it is just a simulation.

Baudrillard believed the media constructs a copy (representation) of the real world and that copy becomes the version of the 'real world' that audiences start to reference. After a while, this representation becomes the accepted version of events and people begin to think of this as the reality. Consider the first season in the *Underbelly* television series that aired in Australia in 2008. This hugely popular program featured stories based on 'real-life events' in Melbourne's criminal underworld. However, if you were to ask people what they knew about some of the underworld figures—people such as Carl Williams or Alphonse Gangitano—many people would reference what they know about the characters in the series, rather than knowledge they have acquired about the real people.

The concept of simulacra is also illustrated in online 'realities' such as Second Life, and some role-playing computer games, where users lead virtual lives that have no origin in reality.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 Explain Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and hyperreality in your own words, using examples to support your answer. What are some of the theory's strengths and weaknesses?
- 2 Think about your own experience of hyperreality or simulacra, then pair up with a classmate and share your experiences.
- 3 Can you identify any potential social consequences as a result of audiences and their hyperreal experiences?

CULTURAL STUDIES AND RECEPTION THEORIES

In 1973, Stuart Hall led media effects research into another direction. Hall rejected the body of research before him, specifically George Gerbner's approach of counting acts of violence and using statistics as a means of measuring audience response. Hall specifically called his work 'cultural studies' rather than 'media studies' as he believed the media to be intrinsically linked to the power structures within a society and culture as a whole. Hall determined that audiences derive meaning from the media through understanding particular signs via discourse: an ongoing discussion, framework or idea about a topic held in society.

Hall's theory reinforced the idea that the media carries strong messages and that audiences interpret messages individually by a process of negotiation. Similar in concept to semiotic theory, Hall called his theory the Encoding/Decoding model. The model belongs to a larger group of theories known collectively as Reception theories. What these theories have in common is that they all emphasise the role the audience plays in determining meaning in media texts. From semiotic theory the idea emerged that audiences 'receive' texts for the purpose of being read, and that these texts are open to multiple readings depending on culture or context.

The hypothesis of Hall's Encoding/Decoding model revolves around three central ideas:

- Meaning is not set by the producer of a text.
- The message is not always visible.
- The reader does not passively receive a text.

Hall suggested that meaning is 'built into' texts through the process of encoding and that when audiences receive a text, they 'decode' it depending on their culture and the context in which it is received. Hall went on to suggest that audiences come to their own individual meanings of texts via a complex process of negotiation and opposition. Audiences actively negotiate meaning with media texts depending on their cultural background. (If a reader rejects a particular text, or the text 'fails', it may be because the text was in opposition to their cultural background, personal beliefs, orientation etc.) The meaning of a text is negotiated between the producer and the reader; even if the producer intended, or encoded, the text to mean something specific, the reader will derive meaning according to their own interpretation. Hall called this process the 'margin for understanding'.

Under Hall's theory, the reception of a text can also be dependent on how the audience receives the text, such as in a cinema, in front of a television at home or via download on computer. After watching a film in a darkened cinema on a large screen, and then viewing the same film on a smartphone while travelling to school, you may tell others, 'It seemed so different the second time I watched it!' Another factor to consider is whether the audience can be distracted when receiving the text, and the effect this can have on the reading. For example, a person's mood and external distracters, such as the phone ringing in the middle of an important television drama scene, can disrupt a person's focus and, in turn, affect their reading of the text.

CRITICISMS OF CULTURAL STUDIES AND RECEPTION THEORIES

Critics of cultural studies and reception theories believe that these theories do not make any real advances in determining significant media influence as their focus is too narrow. Specifically, Hall's complex but critical contribution to reception theory has been criticised for the limited boundaries that he places on audience readings; to suggest a text is either accepted or rejected implies that audiences are constantly engaged in their media consumption, and this does not make allowances for the apathetic, disinterested or accidental audience. It is also difficult to prove an audience will accept or reject a text based on cultural background—a person may be 'culturally appropriate' to a particular text, but perhaps the text just does not interest them.

It is believed that cultural studies and reception theories need to accommodate the most contemporary ways in which people are using the media. It is not enough simply to say that audiences create multiple readings of a text. In today's world, many media consumers use multiple channels and methods of media use, often at the same time.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 Explain Hall's Encoding/Decoding model in your own words. What are some of the model's strengths and weaknesses?
- 2 The infamous shower scene in Alfred Hitchcock's film *Psycho* (1960) has become a part of popular culture. Many people recognise the distinct sounds and shot composition and know what happens in the scene, even if they have never watched the whole film. Does prior knowledge of a key part of a text alter the reception of it for new viewers?

EVALUATING AND ANALYSING MEDIA EFFECTS RESEARCH



Communication theories are not directly related to media effects research, but these theories are used to evaluate the relevance of research claims. For example, research by one group may seem logical when assessing the results as an example of the Uses and Gratification theory, but the same research may appear flawed when discussing it in terms of Semiotic Constructivist theory. Investigating different claims of influence and viewpoints regarding the media's effect on audiences can help with applying this knowledge to an understanding of communication theories.

When analysing studies associated with issues of media influence, it is important to be rigorous in assessing the data and to consider the following points:

- Under what conditions was the research conducted? Was the research done within a realistic context?
- Was the study empirically tested (under controlled conditions)? Or is it based on anecdotal speculations?

- Who is the 'audience'? How many people were tested? What socio-economic background(s) do they have?
- Do the results occur as a result of coincidence? Or are the results represented by a statistical average?
- How legitimate was the study? Who conducted it and where?
- Is the parallel being drawn between the media and influence a logical and supported claim?

RESEARCH METHODS

Just as there are different theories on the ways in which communication occurs, there are different ways in which the influence of the media can be researched. The techniques for compiling this research can vary significantly, and these methods can often mould and enhance a subject's response. Some of these methods include laboratory studies, longitudinal studies, quantitative research, and qualitative and ethnographic research.

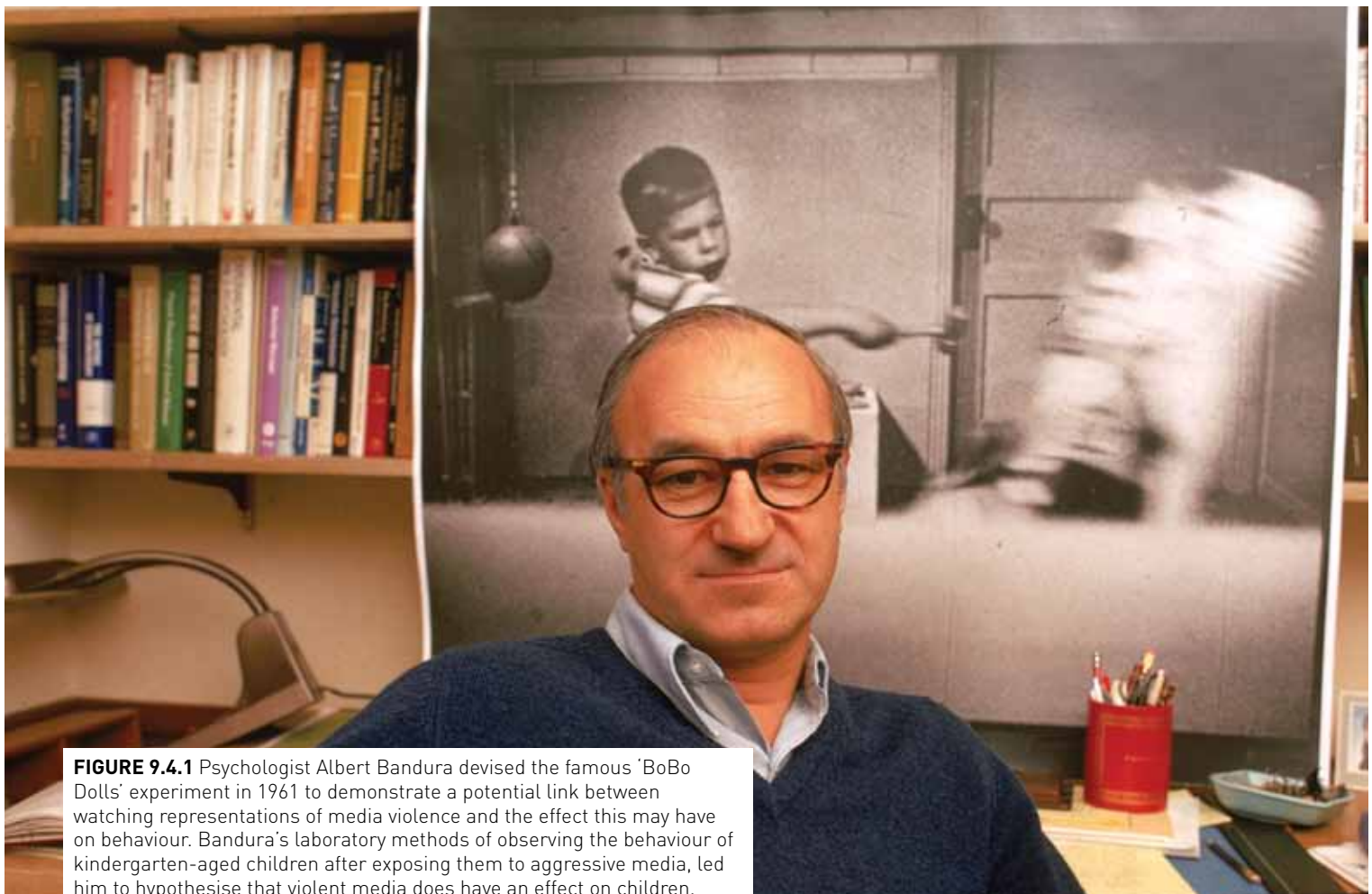


FIGURE 9.4.1 Psychologist Albert Bandura devised the famous 'BoBo Dolls' experiment in 1961 to demonstrate a potential link between watching representations of media violence and the effect this may have on behaviour. Bandura's laboratory methods of observing the behaviour of kindergarten-aged children after exposing them to aggressive media, led him to hypothesise that violent media does have an effect on children.

LABORATORY STUDIES

A laboratory study is conducted within a 'controlled' environment. This simply means that the test is carried out under supervised conditions and may be observed by the person conducting the experiment. The subjects who are taking part in the experiment are representative of a random sample of people, and will usually be selected according to the nature of the experiment.

In laboratory studies, subjects are split into groups and the testing carried out on one group may be different to the testing carried out on other groups. However, for all groups the test must be carried out in exactly the same environment or else the testing cannot be said to be consistent.

Laboratory testing is not regarded as an accurate method for interpreting the influence of the media on audiences. This is because the environment and method under which the experiments take place are regarded as artificial and not a true reflection of the ways in which the media is experienced and received by audiences.

LONGITUDINAL STUDIES

Longitudinal studies are studies that are conducted over a long period of time. This method is considered to be more legitimate than some other methods, as the testing is carried out over significant periods of time on the same people, and the level of media influence can be determined with greater accuracy. Longitudinal studies are usually not conducted in an artificial environment, and therefore reflect a more realistic approach to determining the extent of influence.

One of the most difficult aspects of testing audiences for their level of media influence is that just about the entire civilised world has experienced the media in some way. However, Tannis MacBeth Williams conducted a study (1973–76) in a small town in Canada that did not yet have television. (It should be noted that they did have other forms of media, such as newspapers and radio.) The town was introduced to television at the beginning of her study, and the focus of the study was to attempt to assess the possibility of a rise in aggressive behaviour in children. At the conclusion of the study, Williams proposed that over the course of three years there was a rise in aggressive behaviour in children and that this was a

result of the advent of television. However, the study did not take into account that a freeway was being built through the town at the same time that television was introduced to the community. This freeway may have also contributed to the rise in aggressive behaviour through road rage, noise pollution and an increase in unfamiliar people travelling through the town. Therefore, it is not possible to determine accurately the extent of media influence on behaviour, as other factors may have also determined the change in the community.

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Quantitative research, a technique used extensively by George Gerbner in his Cultivation theory, is based on statistical data collated via surveys, polls and questionnaires. People may be asked numerous questions about their opinions towards media influence and given a limited number of response options to choose from. This helps researchers to categorise and count opinions but it does not allow for more complicated questions and answers, such as defining violence.

Quantitative research can often be misleading and present an inaccurate representation of the entire media audience. It is important to be wary of studies that claim that a certain percentage of people surveyed believe the media is too violent, unless you are given accurate information on who was surveyed, the questions asked and so on. Statistics provided without this kind of information may reflect a very small number of people, or the subjects interviewed may not fit the profile of the intended audience. The ways in which questions are posed can also influence or lead to a particular response.

QUALITATIVE AND ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

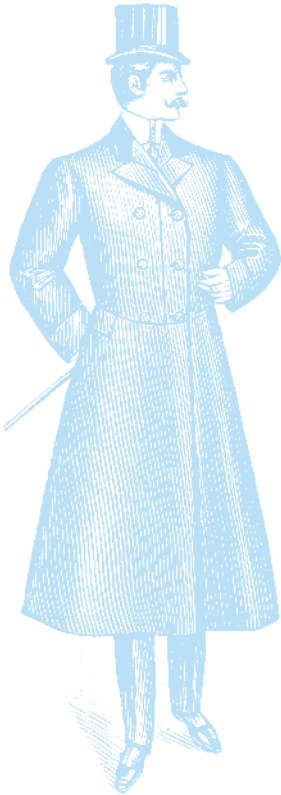
Qualitative research techniques are widely regarded as the most appropriate methods of conducting research into the influence of the media, and are most commonly used today. Researchers, such as David Buckingham from the United Kingdom, use qualitative strategies, such as in-depth interviews, to ask detailed questions and elicit thorough responses from individuals. Qualitative research allows for interpretation and elaboration of a subject's responses, and takes into account factors such as age, ethnicity and culture.

Ethnographic studies involve the researcher becoming a part of the audience being researched; the researcher then uses this first-hand experience to see into the audience's world. A criticism of this method is that ethnographers can become too close to the audience or topic being researched, which can limit their ability to present unbiased research.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 Outline the strengths and weaknesses for each media effects research method. Try to find research that has been conducted according to each method. You may even be able to extend your findings to appropriate communication theories.
- 2 Your teacher will divide the class into four groups and assign each group a method of research. If you are in the quantitative group, you will have to use simple surveys, whereas if you are using qualitative methods, you will be required to interview people at length. Each group must design an experiment/ research method to investigate something of importance/interest within the senior school community (remembering that you must have the same age group in order to have consistent results). Topics could include desired changes to the canteen menu, the most popular musical band, the best song of the year etc. When you have conducted your research, discuss the findings with the rest of the class and evaluate the most effective methods of research.

AUDIENCES AND THE MEDIA



If you want to use television to teach somebody, you must first teach them how to use television.

Umberto Eco, Italian semiotician

UNDERSTANDING AUDIENCES

As students of the media, you know that media products and texts are constructed for consumption by audiences. Loosely categorised, these audiences may include children, teenagers, adults and the elderly. Each person within an audience is likely to interpret the media differently, according to their gender, social class, culture and knowledge. Some groups of audiences are said to be more vulnerable to harmful media content. Research often looks specifically at these groups, but accurately assessing the effect of the media on any audience is difficult. In the words of Henry Jenkins, media researcher and author, media texts:

are not simple chemical agents like carcinogens that produce predictable results upon those who consume them. They are complex bundles of often contradictory meanings that can yield an enormous range of different responses from the people who consume them.

'Media Violence Debates', Media Awareness Network website, 2011

The audience that attracts the most research and debate about media influence and harm, particularly in relation to television, is that of children up to the

age of approximately fifteen. This audience is one of the highest users of television and debate rages on whether they are able to differentiate between what is real and what is fantasy.

CHILDREN AND THE MEDIA

Numerous studies have explored how children are influenced by the media. The popularity of television in the 1960s raised questions about the impact this new medium might have on 'vulnerable minds'. Many laboratory studies were conducted to establish whether there was a connection between children's behaviour and violent media. Research including Albert Bandura's famous 'BoBo Dolls' experiment (1961) and Robert Liebert and Robert Baron's 'Help-Hurt' experiment (1972), attempted to prove that children were susceptible to being influenced by the media because of their tendency to mimic behaviour and their inability to differentiate between reality and make-believe. At the time, these studies influenced the way in which children's relationship with television was understood; however, these experiments are now highly criticised for their artificial laboratory settings and for being far removed from children's interaction with the media in everyday life.

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EFFECTS

There is a body of research that supports the hypothesis that the media does have a negative effect on children. It is claimed that due to media exposure (mostly through television) children become more socially isolated, are increasingly passive, suffer lower levels of literacy, develop poor attitudes towards health and fitness and can prematurely develop sexual knowledge. In contrast, there has also been research to support media consumption in children as a means to develop social interaction and inclusion, create an understanding of the world around them, form an imagination, and to encourage problem solving through representations of conflict. These arguments suggest that the media can have a positive and negative influence on young viewers.

Most researchers agree that children are a complex audience who deserve more credit for their knowledge of the media than they have previously been given. Robert Hodge and David Tripp's 'Ten theses on children and television' is a well-known research project that explores the relationship between children and television. A summary of some of their findings reveals:

- Children are semiotic learners (through language of signs) that have the capacity to be active and powerful decoders of television.
- Children's cognitive and semiotic systems develop up until the age of twelve. From the age of nine they are able to have some understanding of mainstream adult television.
- The ability to make judgements about what is 'real' on television is a major developmental milestone that can only be reached if children experience television in the first place.
- Media violence is very different from real violence, and children should see mild representations of conflict on television to learn to recognise the differences.
- Meanings gained from television are renegotiated and altered in the process of discourse.
- The family is the most important dimension of a child's understanding of the world, not television.

Adapted from Robert Hodge & David Tripp, 'Ten theses on children and television' in *Children and Television: A Semiotic Approach*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, USA, 1986

Hodge and Tripp's research supports the idea that children can make their own meanings from what they see in the media, much like the reception theories suggested earlier in the chapter.

Much of the research about children and the media is based on television exposure; however, there have been huge developments in new media consumption in recent years. Parents of babies as young as a few months old are encouraged by advertisers to expose their children to a variety of media forms, such as educational DVDs and smartphone applications. Marketing of children's clothing and toys based on media texts is also at a high. Time-pressed parents are using media forms such as television and DVDs to occupy their children, and in many homes the glow of the television is a constant presence. Some experts warn that this growth in media use and exposure is unmatched by children's natural development and cognitive skills, meaning the potential future impact on them is difficult to measure.

Quantitative research into the new trend in heightened media consumption for children reveals some alarming data. 'Zero to Six: Electronic Media in the Lives of Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers', reports on the results of a US family foundation study, questioning more than 1000 parents of children aged six months to six years about media usage and children. Significant findings of the study include the following:

- Children six and under spend an average of two hours a day with screen media, mostly television and videos/DVDs.
- A high proportion of very young children are using new digital media, including 50 per cent of four- to six-year-olds who have played video games and 70 per cent who have used computers.
- Two out of three zero- to six-year-olds live in homes where the television is usually left on at least half the time, even if no one is watching, and one-third live in homes where the television is on 'almost all' or 'most' of the time; children in the latter group of homes appear to read less than other children and seem to be slower learners when it comes to reading.

Adapted from The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 'Zero to Six: Electronic Media in the Lives of Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers', 2003

This research data raises old concerns about the possible negative impacts and consequences of media consumption. However, Professor David Gauntlett disagrees with the emphasis of the media having a harmful effect on children. He believes children are negatively labelled as 'non-adults', which makes them difficult to assess. Gauntlett also objects to traditional approaches of measuring children's responses to the media; in particular, he views laboratory studies

as ridiculously artificial situations that do not value the ways in which children actively use the media. Gauntlett reminds media researchers to see children as an audience of savvy and native users of new media.

THE MEDIA'S POSITIVE EFFECTS ON THE COMMUNITY

case study

SOCIAL MARKETING AND ADVERTISING CAMPAIGNS

While much of the focus on media effects centres on negative aspects, the media also has positive social effects within specific communities. Television is a highly accessible medium that has enormous potential for reaching a large audience, and, as such, television has the ability to screen campaigns for social change.

Social marketing campaigns aim to promote behavioural change in the community and, like all marketing campaigns, are designed to influence action and behaviour. They focus on altering the perceptions of the target audience by helping people accept and understand new or alternative ideas, and then value this new way of thinking highly enough to modify their behaviour or convert their change in attitude into positive action.

Social marketing talks to the consumer about the consequences of their actions, not about a product. It works effectively when adopted by health, education, environment, and economic groups and organisations that want to alter people's behaviours to address specific social concerns.

Australia was one of the first countries in the world to produce social marketing campaigns, with the establishment of the 'Life. Be in it.' campaign in 1975, which aims to promote healthy and active lifestyles. The 'Slip Slop Slap' anti-skin cancer campaign followed in 1981.

An influential and controversial campaign for its time was a graphic and realistic anti-AIDS advertisement, which screened to Australian television audiences in April 1987. The 'Grim Reaper' advertisement had enormous social impact and contributed to the lowering of transmission rates of HIV/AIDS in Australia, as well as increasing awareness of other sexually transmissible diseases.

Possibly the best-known example of an Australian media campaign devised to instigate positive social change is the TAC (Transport Accident Commission) campaign, which has been creating television commercials in Victoria since 1989. These advertisements depict the graphic reality of road accidents and the confronting aftermath, and were developed in response to the alarming rise in road deaths throughout Victoria. The advertisements have helped to halve the road toll in a matter of years.

case study activities

SOCIAL MARKETING AND ADVERTISING CAMPAIGNS

- 1 Can you think of any advertising campaigns that have influenced you in either positive or negative ways?
- 2 Examine the TAC advertisement in Figure 9.5.1 and answer the following questions:
 - a Who is the advertisement aimed at? How do you know this?
 - b How are semiotics used in the advertisement?
 - c Describe the techniques that have been used to draw people's attention.
 - d Do you think the advertisement is an effective way to promote road safety? Explain your answer.
- 3 Analyse the TAC advertisement in Figure 9.5.1, using any of the media effects theories or models you have studied. For example, you could start your analysis with this opening: 'Looking at this example from the TAC road safety campaign, the Hypodermic/Bullet theory would suggest that audiences would respond...'. Try this approach with opposing theories, and compare and contrast your findings.

I know I looked terrible.
Lack of sleep does that,
because your body
produces heaps more
skin cells when you're
asleep. No sleep, no
skin repair. The things
you learn too late.
After Elsie came along

the candle was burning at both ends. Poor love - previous night she'd had a nightmare and we'd been up for hours. Snakes. It must have been that trip to the zoo. Then my shift started at seven. I almost put hand cream on my toothbrush that Friday. **Away with the pixies.** They talk of sleep debt; mine was more like the national debt. If too little sleep can cause Chernobyl and the Exxon Valdez, what chance did I have? All that day I felt like I was living under water. It comes with the territory when you're a working Mum. A sleep anorexic,

starving myself of the
most essential life force
of all. But on Saturday
I'd get a good lie-in,
snuggled up to Elsie,
buried in her warm Elsie
smells. It's only a short
trip. My eyes glazed
over and I missed a
turn. Whoops, and a red
light. But I'd be home
soon and she'd rush
up the hallway to show
me the drawing she'd
done with Nanna. Mid-
afternoon, Siesta time.
It's not such a bad way
to die. You're in a trance
for the last couple of
seconds. The brain has
already said 'I'm out of
here'. The dotted white
line. Then a pole I must
have passed a hundred
times without noticing
it. And now Mummy
won't be there for Elsie's
Easter egg hunt. **TAC**

FIGURE 9.5.1 A Transport Accident Commission (TAC) Easter print advertisement, encouraging people to avoid driving if they are sleep deprived. The TAC is known for developing hard-hitting print and screen road safety campaigns.

THE MEDIA'S NEGATIVE EFFECTS ON THE COMMUNITY

case study

VIOLENCE IN THE MEDIA

The debate surrounding the effects of media violence on audiences, particularly children, is central to media effects research. It is difficult for experts to reach agreement in this area, just as it is challenging to define what constitutes 'media violence'.

While discussion continues about whether exposure to media violence causes real and actual aggression, many media commentators agree that when people respond aggressively or violently in society and commit horrible acts of violence, other factors must be considered before immediately placing blame on the media. Joseph Klapper (a proponent of the Reinforcement theory) wrote:

Communications research strongly indicates that media depictions of crime and violence are not prime moves towards such conduct. The content seems rather to reinforce or implement existing and otherwise induced behavioural tendencies. For the well adjusted, it appears to be innocuous or even to be selectively perceived as socially useful. For the maladjusted, particularly the aggressively inclined and the frustrated, it appears to serve, at the very least, as a stimulant to escapist and possibly aggressive fantasy, and probably to serve other functions as yet unidentified.

Joseph T. Klapper, *The Effects of Mass Communication*, Free Press, Glencoe, Illinois, USA, 1960

The most vocal criticism of violent media often comes from government bodies, and some media commentators suggest the media is merely a scapegoat for all the problems in society. Lee Burton, an Australian media writer and commentator, believes governments need to look at what is happening in society before they criticise violent media:

The issue of violence in the media is a very attractive one for governments, both state and federal, because it lets them off the hook. [There are] a lot of 'moral panics' about violence in the cinema, violence on the screen ... and it allows you to neatly sidestep the real issues of why people are violent in our society: unemployment, poverty, racial tensions—a whole range of societal and cultural problems which governments here and overseas seem unwilling or unable to tackle.

Violence on the Screen, educational program, Video Education Australasia, 1998

CATHARSIS AND DESENSITISATION

Theories about violence are as old as civilisation itself. The ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle, developed the theory of catharsis. He believed that people could purge themselves of strong emotions by watching tragedies at the theatre. The idea of catharsis has since been extended to the modern media. Feshbach and Singer (1971) extensively researched this theory and proposed that watching aggressive media does not make viewers more aggressive; it actually enables the viewer to experience violence vicariously, resulting in less aggressive behaviour. A similar argument has been used to explain Japan's very low level of rape and sexual assault, despite the fact that as a society it produces some of the most vivid and violent physical and sexual animation (known as anime) in the world.

Some people argue that the media cultivates a society that is desensitised to violence. Desensitisation refers to the theory that continuous exposure to media violence, both implicit and explicit, can result in audience members having reduced or no sensitivity to real violence, and reduced or no empathy for human suffering. Desensitisation is often cited as a reason for video game 'copycat' crimes, where heavy users of violent computer games use guns with remarkable skill to kill other human beings.

case study activities

VIOLENCE IN THE MEDIA

- 1 What is violence? How do you personally define violence? Is violence verbal, non-verbal, physical, emotional, implied or contextual?
- 2 If everyone has different ideas on what constitutes violence, how can we accurately monitor its influence?
- 3 In your opinion, is violence ever socially acceptable? What about violence in sport or on the news?
- 4 Are we living in violent times? Do you think the media simply reflects the society that we live in? Explain your answer.
- 5 Do you agree that audiences can become desensitised? Explain your answer.
- 6 What is the most violent incident you have ever witnessed in the media? Compare it to the most violent thing you have ever experienced in real life. Which was more traumatic? Which one can you recall more vividly?



FIGURE 9.5.2 Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980) is a horror film that has been referenced repeatedly in popular culture, particularly the famously scary 'Here's Johnny!' sequence. How audiences respond to violence in the media is widely debated. What some people find scary, others find entertaining and worthy of praise and homage.

7 Violence is not limited to the visual medium—it can also be heard in music. Research lyrics by a variety of music artists, and discuss as a class whether you regard these texts as being violent, entertaining, or perhaps both.

8 Japanese society is widely recognised as having low incidences of violence and crime, yet it produces some of the most violent animation in the world. Does violence have to be 'real' in order for it to be deemed violent? Investigate Japanese anime and its context within Japanese culture.

REGULATION AND CLASSIFICATION



Hurry up and twirl! We need to get this take done before we get arrested for dancing in the field.

MEDIA REGULATION

Upon examining communication theories and models, looking at research and evidence, and analysing media audiences, the final piece of the media influence puzzle lies with the critical and often contentious area of media regulation.

Many people agree that children need to be protected from harmful and offensive media content, and most people believe that regulation upholds community values of decency and fairness. Regulation is not censorship and it does not attempt to be; but regulating what certain people have access to means that parts of the community are not exposed to what is deemed by the government and society to be inappropriate.

The Australian media is self-regulated, and is also governed by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA). There is a range of different regulatory requirements that media organisations must adhere to. If a member of the public finds something in the media offensive, they have the right to make a complaint for the ACMA to investigate and enforce disciplinary action if a breach in the relevant regulatory code is identified.

According to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website, Australia's news and entertainment media has a robust tradition of free expression and dynamic analysis of public policy. Strong competition exists in a variety of media outlets, as well as in new digital media. This is accompanied by a lively debate about the role and influence of the media in Australian society, with government policies supporting diversity among media outlets through a range of regulatory arrangements. By allowing the media to be self-regulated, the government is allowing Australian society to have access to a range of media.

ARGUMENTS FOR REGULATION IN AUSTRALIA

- There are audiences in Australian society that should be protected from inappropriate content, such as children. The protection of the vulnerable is held in the highest regard in Australian society.
- It is easier for government and industry bodies to regulate the media and protect vulnerable groups in society. Many parents claim they cannot physically monitor all the media their children have access to.

- Regulation should be in place to prevent content that encourages racial, religious and sexual discrimination. Australians want to live in a society that promotes and is tolerant of diversity.
- In Australia, media ownership is highly concentrated. Any regulation of the industry is positive as it can help to prevent media owners from setting agendas through their content.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST REGULATION IN AUSTRALIA

- Self-regulation means that the government provides only advisory information to media organisations, so harmful content may still be shown or become available to susceptible audiences. Printing warnings on the packaging of video games, or screening a warning before a television program is not enough of a deterrent to prevent vulnerable audiences from being exposed to harmful content.
- It is not the government's responsibility to protect children from inappropriate media. Parents must take an active role in monitoring how their children use the media and influencing their consumption choices, rather than remaining ignorant about its impact.
- Australia is a democratic country that prides itself on diverse media. Regulation threatens this variety as whoever regulates the media has the potential to limit an audience's exposure to new and progressive content.
- Regulation threatens to create a 'nanny state' where the media becomes so controlled that there is little opportunity for varied content, differing opinions and democratic speech.

CLASSIFICATION AND CENSORSHIP

Australia has one of the strictest classification systems in the world, which has been overseen by the Classification Board since 1970. Any film, video game or adult literature intended for distribution must be allocated a classification, or rating, before it can be released to the public. While the government body cannot directly change any content submitted for classification, it can effectively censor the media by refusing an item classification and making it illegal to hire, exhibit or sell in Australia. The board has come under criticism in recent years, in particular for its tough stance on R 18+ (restricted to 18 years and over) video game classification, which has led critics to label it an inflexible classification system.



FIGURE 9.6.1 Research suggests that parents and guardians need to be more involved in what media their children consume.

China has a heavily regulated media industry and until the 1980s the government generated most of the country's media. With the advent of the internet, the Chinese government became concerned about the potential for public dissent to manifest and imposed strict control filters in search engines, such as Google, to censor the public from content that is critical of Chinese politics, religion and culture. The Press Freedom Index, compiled and published annually by Reporters Without Borders, ranks countries based upon the organisation's assessment of their press freedom records. China often ranks towards the bottom of the list, with countries such as North Korea and Iran.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 Do you think that media regulation is important? Give two arguments to support your answer.
- 2 Imagine an Australian media without regulation. What do you think would happen in society?
- 3 Find out where Australia ranks in the Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Index. Do you think the ranking is a fair assessment of Australia's press freedom records?
- 4 Research the Classification Board's stance on R 18+ video game classification. Discuss your findings in a class debate where one group is pro prohibiting the sale of R 18+ games and the other group argue against prohibition. Assess if any arguments can be related to communication theories or models. For example, the argument, 'You don't have to play R 18+ games if you don't want to' supports the Uses and Gratification theory's approach to audiences actively choosing media texts.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Communication theories are used to explain the complex relationship between the media and audiences. The theories assist in evaluating examples, research and case studies where the media is said to have influence over an audience.
- At the core of communication theory is the role of the audience. Over time, audiences have been described as either passive or active. Some theorists believe audiences create individual meanings from texts, rather than reacting en masse to media messages.
- There are many different issues in assessing the influence of the media on audiences. It is important to consider how gender, age, socio-economic status, political and cultural backgrounds contribute to an audience's susceptibility to media influence. It is difficult to be certain of the extent of media influence on audiences, as this depends on individual interpretation.
- Research into the influence of the media can take many forms, and it is necessary to be critically aware of the ways in which research has been conducted. Some methods include laboratory studies, longitudinal, quantitative, qualitative and ethnographical research, as well as less highly regarded anecdotal examples and case studies.
- The Australian government supports diversity of content in the media, but the industry also operates within strict guidelines or 'codes of practice'. Australia's media is regulated for the purpose of protecting certain audiences from harmful and offensive content.
- Despite all the evidence from research, studies and examples to suggest that the media has an influence on audiences, the debate concerning the extent of the media's influence remains inconclusive.

EXAM PREPARATION

- 1 Using any two communication theories and/or models that you have studied this year, compare and contrast how these theories and/or models assess the relationship between the media and the audience.
- 2 The relationship between the media and the audience is complex. Using two communication theories that are different to the theories you have explored in question 1, explain how this relationship exists via a range of media forms and texts.
- 3 What are the key arguments about media influence? Discuss at least two viewpoints about the influence the media is believed to have on audiences, using research to support each viewpoint.
- 4 Over time, expert opinion has changed about how audiences are said to respond to the media. Using one particular audience demographic (e.g. children, teenagers etc.) discuss the relationship between this audience and the media. Use media effects theories and/or models, research and examples to support your response.
- 5 Discuss the arguments for and against the regulation of any two media forms you have studied this year. You should use research and evidence to support your response.

GLOSSARY

actuality

- 1 Sounds and dialogue recorded on location
- 2 In documentary film, footage of an interview subject at work or performing an action that is relevant to the topic/subject of the film

ad lib

Improvised performance, dialogue or banter

Agenda-Setting Function theory

Originating with the Birmingham School of cultural studies, this theory suggests that the media cannot dictate to **audiences** 'what to think', but it does have the power to dictate 'what to think *about*'. This theory also suggests that the media has the power to set the agenda or terms of reference for any social, political or economic issue in society

alley

The space between two **columns** of text. Also sometimes known as the **gutter**

anecdotal observations

Informal and personal viewpoints, as opposed to thoroughly researched study

audience

- 1 The target group at which a media product is pitched (e.g. teenagers, women)
- 2 In cultural theory, the spectators or viewers who are active in the creation of meaning for the work within which they are interacting

back announce

When a presenter announces the name and artist of a song that has just played on the radio

back light

Light positioned behind the subject to create a silhouette effect

blog

A frequently updated online journal

brief

A set of guidelines developed for advertising agencies and/or creative teams to use in developing advertising concepts or material for a particular product

broadsheet

A large-page format newspaper. This format implies stories will be covered extensively and in depth, with high-quality writing. Australian examples include *The Age* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* (see also **tabloid**)

camera angle

The position of a camera in relation to its subject (e.g. high angle, low angle)

camera operator

The person who operates the camera, frames the image etc.

catharsis

In media, the theory that watching aggressive media does not make viewers more aggressive, rather it enables the viewer to experience violence vicariously, resulting in less aggressive behaviour

censorship

The suppression of **communication** that a ruling body, such as a government, deems inappropriate, harmful or inconvenient to a greater social purpose

character generator (CG) operator

The person who places text over visuals on film

cinematographer

The person responsible for arranging lighting, lenses, film stock and the general look of the finished image. Not to be confused with the **camera operator**

circulation

The readership of a print publication, such as a newspaper or magazine

clipping

Distortion that occurs in audio when the signal is too high

close-up

A type of camera shot that frames its subject up close (e.g. a person's head filling the frame)

codes and conventions

The structural production elements that can be employed to create a mutually determined understanding of a text. Codes and conventions are the 'rules' and 'established practices' by which a media form is structured to fulfil certain **audience** expectations. For example, in a 'horror' film the audience expects dark lighting and scary music. In a 'road' movie, the audience expects wide shots of vehicles driving through landscapes. The audience expects these codes and conventions to appear consistently within certain **genres**

column

A vertical block of text on a printed page

communication

The means by which a message is relayed or transmitted from a sender to a receiver. Modes of communication include television, film, radio, print, the internet and other **new media**

communication models

Ways of thinking about the process of **communication**

communication theories

Theories devised to help people understand the complex relationship between the media and **audiences**

computer-generated imagery (CGI)

Images, sequences or entire films that use the advances of computer technology to assist the narrative or spectacle of a media form

conglomerate

A group of companies controlled or governed by the same umbrella organisation

connotation

The process by which meaning is attached to an object

convergence

The combining of traditional media forms with computer-based media to create **new media**

copy

Printed matter intended to be reproduced in print or spoken aloud (e.g. as a radio script)

copyright

The legal rights of an author or creator of an original work to control how their work is reproduced, adapted and/or distributed

cross-cutting

A film **editing** technique used to show action occurring at the same time in different locations

crossfade

An audio **editing** technique that creates a fade from one sound to another

cross-media ownership

Organisations or individuals having a controlling interest in more than one form of media, such as a television network and a newspaper, which operate within the same geographical area

cue

A signal to begin an action, a segment or a piece of music

Cultivation theory

A theory developed in the 1970s by Professor George Gerbner, which proposes that television is a powerful medium that is able to shape ideas in society about what is important and what is right

culture jamming

The process of mimicking or modifying a media message, particularly those found in advertising, to make a social or political statement

cutaway

The interruption of a continuously filmed action by inserting vision of something else

cut-in

A film **editing** technique involving two shots: a distant view of a scene and a closer view of the same scene

demographics

Classifying people based on factors such as age, gender, education and income. When advertisers buy commercial time or space from media outlets they like to target a specific **audience** based on its demographic breakdown

denotation

The process of attaching a name and a definition to an object

depth of field

The distance between the nearest and furthest objects in a scene captured by a camera that will produce a reasonably clear and sharp image

desensitisation

A term used to discuss the potential mental state of **audiences** attained from over-exposure to certain **representations** in media texts. Desensitisation occurs when audiences become so accustomed to viewing, for example, violence in the media, that they have difficulty in differentiating between real violence and screen violence. While often used in discussions of violence, the term is equally applicable to representations of racism or sexism

diegetic

All that occurs within the world of the film, television program etc. Put simply, if an actor can see, touch or hear it, it is diegetic. A radio playing while characters are driving somewhere is usually diegetic sound; music played over the opening titles or credits is non-diegetic sound

diffuser

Any semi-transparent material that softens a light and reduces shadows

digital divide

The division or separation of the **audience** due to the acquisition, or lack, of technology. Without technology some 'information poor' societies may become culturally disadvantaged while the 'information rich' societies progress with the aid of technology

digital rights management (DRM)

A way to control how the digital files of authors and creators are used

director

The person responsible for the 'look' and style of a film

discourse

- 1 Described by cultural theorist Stuart Hall as an ongoing discussion, framework or idea about a topic held in society
- 2 Also described by Michel Foucault, the French philosopher, as a system of overarching thought or thinking that governs how connections between ideas and **social values** can be made, or how power relations within a society can exist or be maintained. For example, a legal discourse, a medical discourse etc.

divergence

When an existing technology is completely replaced by a newer one (e.g. the shift from analogue to digital)

documentary

A piece of work that claims a relationship to or purports to present an actual event

drop cap

The first letter of a paragraph that is substantially larger, and sometimes more ornate, than the rest of the text

editing

The arranging of film, video, photography, or text for a product or publication to achieve a desired end

ethnographic research

A method of research in which the researcher becomes a part of the **audience** being researched; the researcher then uses this first-hand experience to see into the audience's world

fade

In film, the gradual increase or decrease of vision or sound

fill light

Additional light that is used to soften shadows cast by the **key light**

film noir

Literally translates to 'black film'. A type of film in which the story is often gritty and 'realistic', and usually features a 'femme fatale' or woman who lures the male protagonist to his downfall. Film noir is characterised by an emphasis on lighting and shadows

film score

The background music within a film

floor manager

The person in a television studio who is responsible for organising everything on the studio floor

framing

The idea that the media can purposely manipulate an issue to heighten its importance and make it a talking point for the public through a process of selection, exclusion, emphasis and elaboration. Also known as the 'transfer of salience'

freedom of the press

A concept proposing the media can express an opinion or publish a story free from the interference and **censorship** of government and large corporations. The term usually refers to newspapers, but can be applied to all news-gathering and distribution services

gaffer

The person responsible for the lighting and electrical work on a film or television set

gain

Amplification of a sound

gatekeeping

The process in which news items are selected for distribution by the producers of news programs or newspapers, based on values, public interest and the people's 'need to know'. Certain stories are omitted, or left out of news reports because they conflict with the values and interests held by the network or publisher, or are deemed not important enough to be shown to the public

genre

- 1 A French word meaning 'type' and a way of classifying media products into categories
- 2 A way or mode of production that conforms to narrative and filmic conventions as well as **audience** expectations

grip

The person responsible for the sets and props on a film or television set

gutter

The blank space between two adjoining pages of printed text to allow for binding

hand-held

A type of camera movement in which the camera is in the operator's hand and not on a tripod. Hand-held camera movement is often used in film to create tension or to simulate a stressful situation

Hypodermic/Bullet theory

According to this theory, messages are received by **audiences** in a direct and undiluted manner; they are injected like a hypodermic syringe or a bullet shot from a gun. Audiences absorb these messages like sponges or 'sitting ducks', and are influenced by the messages that are being communicated to them

ideology

The dominant set of ideas and myths by which a society lives and considers to be 'truths'; thus, ideology informs all art works

intellectual property

The rights of creators, such as writers, artists or designers, to own their ideas or works

intertextuality

A text that refers to other texts (e.g. the *Wayne's World* films are a treasure trove of intertextuality)

jack

In electricity, a socket that typically allows a 3.5 mm or 6.3 mm audio connection

jingle

A repetitious and catchy short piece of music, used especially for advertising

jump cut

A cut used in film **editing** that jars the viewer by way of a gap, which may be intentional or accidental. Originally viewed as a mistake, this effect is increasingly being used as a filmic device

kerning

The space between letters in printed text that adjusts proportionally depending on the relationship between letters

key light

The main source of light in a scene

kicker

A bright, direct light usually placed just off camera to create highlights on a subject's face

laboratory study

A study conducted within a 'controlled' environment. The test is carried out under supervised conditions and may be observed by the person conducting the experiment

Lazarsfeld's Two-Step Flow theory

Devised in the 1940s by sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld, this theory emphasises the active participation of individuals in the communication process. This theory suggests that people are more likely to be influenced by 'opinion leaders', public figures who are more

adept at interpreting media messages and passing on their interpretations to others, than overt advertising or catchy slogans distributed by the media

leading

The space between lines of printed text

leitmotif

A short sequence of music in a film that is associated with a character or situation (e.g. the famously ominous musical warning of the shark approaching in the 1975 film *Jaws*)

level

The volume of an audio track

linear

To follow a direct line from one stage or event to the next. In film, this describes a type of traditional storytelling that moves from a beginning, to a middle and concludes with an end

longitudinal study

A study conducted over an extended period of time in a non-artificial environment

long shot

A camera shot in which the subject's whole body is seen, usually in relationship to its surroundings

long take

A camera shot that is of long duration, as opposed to Hollywood shots that generally last between five and ten seconds

margin

The space around the printed matter on a page

mass media

A form of media that communicates to a large group of people at the same time; for example, a radio program or a newspaper

match on action

A film **editing** technique achieved by filming a subject from two different shot sizes or angles and cutting the shots together at the same moment the subject performs a particular action

mediation

An influence or interference by a third party between reality and the **representation** of that reality

mid-shot

A camera shot in which the subject is seen from the waist or mid-thigh up

mise en scène

All that is within the frame of a camera shot, such as elements of set design, position of props, use of colours and actors etc.

monitor

The headphones or studio speaker used to monitor a broadcast

monopoly

When ownership and control of the media lies exclusively in the hands of one organisation or individual. This usually occurs in countries that have a dictatorship as a system of government

montage

A technique of film **editing** in which a series of short shots are juxtaposed to convey a single idea. Conventionally, a montage is used to indicate the passing of time but the Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, and later Alfred Hitchcock, used it to create a feeling or emotion

narrative

In film, the art of storytelling through image, light and sound

new media

All emerging digital or electronic **communication** that combines text, graphics, sound and video using computer technology. Examples of new media communication technologies include satellite, broadband, wi-fi, networked and other computer-based systems

non-linear

An approach made possible by the introduction of digital technology, which allows users to move randomly through a text, starting or viewing work at the end, the beginning, the middle or any other combination

oligopoly

When ownership and competition for a particular product is limited to three or four organisations

panning

Horizontal movement of the camera

peer to peer

Sharing files on a one-to-one, direct basis via an internet connection. These files may be images, text, or more commonly video and MP3 music files

piracy

The unauthorised reproduction or use of a copyrighted or patented work, such as music or films

pixilation

Digital images are made up of thousands of tiny pixels or coloured squares. These pixels combine to form images. Pixilation often occurs when digital images are stretched and groupings of these tiny pixels form blocks of colour

Postmodern theory

This theory suggests that all members of an **audience** bring very different perspectives and interpretations to the same text, and that therefore the media may have very little power in influencing audiences. One school argues that there are no dominant or preferred meanings or readings of a text, and there is no such thing as an objective truth, certainty, reality or knowledge. Knowledge is created within and by a specific culture, and so is specific to that culture and to the time in which it was produced

pre-production

The planning or 'inception' stage of media **production**

producer

The person responsible for the financing and management of a media **production**

production

The collecting, filming, designing and creating stage of media production

pro-filmic

The process where filming, or observing an event, changes it

post-production

The assembling, **editing** and finishing stage of media **production**

propaganda

Methods and techniques used by individuals or organisations to persuade large groups of people to have one particular viewpoint or response. For example, prior to and during the Second World War (1939–45), Adolf Hitler controlled and used all film, print and radio media in Germany to promote his policies on particular issues

public's right to know

This concept refers to the right people have to know about the machinations of governments, businesses and institutions, which can affect their lives. Within the public's right to know, it is the role of the media to provide truthful, accurate, unbiased information, free of any commercial or political interests

pull quote

A quote or an extract set apart from printed text and in a more prominent and visually striking manner

qualitative research

A method of research in which subjects are interviewed in depth about specific aspects of the media, and detailed responses are encouraged

quantitative research

A method of research based on statistical data collated via surveys, polls and questionnaires

reception theories

Theories that suggest that people are active in their use and understanding of the media and are concerned with 'what the **audience** *does with* the media'

Reinforcement theory

Theorised by sociologist Joseph Klapper, this theory proposes that the media has very little power to shape or influence public opinion, as **audiences** are active, texts are open to interpretation and media texts reinforce people's existing opinions. Klapper argued that other socialising agencies such as family, peer group, schooling, occupation, religion and social class are far more influential than the media, and that the media can only reinforce existing views and attitudes

reflector board

A white or reflective board used to bounce **key light** back onto a subject

representation

The act of 're-presenting' or attempting to depict a reality. The creator constructs a representation that attempts to portray reality; this is mediated in a number of ways by the processes of selection, omission, construction, and interpretation by the receiver

reverb

A slight echo

sans serif

A font without **serifs**, or 'feet'/lines, at the ends of letterforms, such as Arial, Helvetica and Verdana

segue

The link or transition between two segments or songs

semiotics

A study of the power of symbols and signs, and the meaning people derive from them

serif

A font that has serifs, or 'feet'/lines, at the ends of letterforms, such as Garamond, Times New Roman and Georgia

SFX

Special and sound effects used in media products

simulacra

A concept made famous by French cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard that describes a false reality that is made up of **representations** so convincing that they have replaced what was once real

social media

The use of internet-based technologies to distribute information through online social networks

social value

An attitude towards a **discourse** that a society holds to be true, important or valuable at a particular place and at a particular time. Social values may remain in a society over a number of years and generally change or evolve slowly

sound bite

A short segment of an audio interview

stinger

A brief sound or piece of music often used as an introduction or transition between segments

tabloid

A small-format newspaper that favours pictorial presentation and has a tendency to print stories of a sensationalist nature. A tabloid newspaper generally has a greater amount of sports coverage and more advertisements than a **broadsheet**. Examples in Australia include the *Herald Sun* and *Daily Telegraph*

three-point lighting

A method used in film and photography to illuminate a subject with three separate light positions, such as the **key light**, **back light** and **fill light**. Using a three-point lighting system allows for greater control of shading and shadows within a shot

tilting or tilted

Vertical movement of the camera

tracking

- 1 A type of camera movement in which the camera travels alongside the object being filmed
- 2 Also, the process of increasing or decreasing the space between letters in printed text

Uses and Gratification theory

According to this theory, **audiences** use the media for their own pleasure and gratification. They choose media depending on their moods, needs and desires, and are active in determining the content of the media they choose to consume. The media has no power, and people (consumers) shape the media via ratings and buying habits; the media merely gives the public what it asks for

viral marketing

A strategy that encourages people to spread messages through word of mouth and their individual social networks to create a 'buzz' about a product or service

Web 2.0

A phrase coined by writer Tim O'Reilly in 2004 that describes the way the internet has evolved to incorporate greater interactivity, socialisation and user-generated content

white balance

Involves removing any unrealistic colour casts in a video or photographic camera, so that objects that appear white in person translate to white in the finished product

wiki

A website made up of the collective work of a number of authors that can be edited by visitors to the website

zine

A small, self-published print publication that is usually made with the basic functions of a typewriter, a photocopier and a stapler and circulated within its own informal or underground networks

zooming

A type of camera movement that closes in or pulls away from an object



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