

Introduction

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A note to the student

Welcome to *Media Studies: Key Issues and Debates*. Your textbook brings together the expertise of both firmly-established and newly-emerging scholars who have interesting and insightful things to say about the contemporary mass media. Taken collectively, the contributors to this textbook have a vast amount of experience as teachers, researchers and practitioners in the field of media analysis and production. Working in diverse geographical locations, their contributions make use of illustrative materials from both 'old' and 'new' media that are timely, up-to-date and relevant. The iPod, *The Sopranos*, *Big Brother*, Blogging and 'Street Newspapers' are just some of the better-known examples discussed. The illustrative materials in this textbook draw upon a mixture of well-known globalized media texts as well as ones which are specific to particular localities.

Coming from a variety of academic disciplines and approaches (cultural studies, communications studies, sociology, social psychology, political economy, Marxist, feminist and post-structuralist, to name just a few) the contributors to *Media Studies: Key Issues and Debates* make use of a wide range of theoretical and methodological tools, yet they all share a commitment towards ensuring a critical understanding of the mass media in a social context. Media globalization and technological changes are actively creating an even more complex media landscape which serves to underline many of the long-standing issues and debates within media analysis, as well as creating new kinds of questions particularly about audience agency and, indeed, whether the notion of 'mass' media is in itself becoming redundant.

In bringing this group of scholars together my instructions to them were simple yet challenging. I asked each contributor or team of contributors to write

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a student-friendly and accessible chapter on their particular area of expertise. I also requested that each chapter would begin with a clear definition or definitions of its key concepts; it should provide the student reader with a comprehensive overview of the current state of play in the field; use interesting and geographically diverse examples from a variety of media settings; and provide clear guidance in terms of future study and research. It is my firm hope that you will apply many of the insights contained in this book to your own everyday experiences of the mass media and that this will result in a deeper and more critical understanding of the media-saturated environment in which most of us now live our lives. Furthermore, it is hoped that this textbook will be a starting point for you in terms of going further with your own studies and analysis of the media either at post-graduate level or in your professional lives.

A basic pedagogic principle underlies the organization of *Media Studies: Key Issues and Debates*. It is one of learning by *reading, thinking* and *doing*. This involves:

1. Reading about a particular issue.
2. Thinking carefully about the possible theoretical and methodological options we may have at our disposal if we wish to push the boundaries in terms of how a particular media phenomenon is best understood.
3. Developing the confidence to apply the theoretical concepts and methodological approaches discussed in this textbook in order to understand more about media organizations, media producers, media content and media audiences.

With this in mind, each of the book's 16 chapters contains the following:

- A definition or definitions of the key concept(s) being examined.
- A discussion providing you with a comprehensive overview of the key debates, which are currently taking place amongst researchers.
- Boxes and tables containing up-to-date illustrative materials and data.
- Detailed case studies.
- Useful chapter summaries.
- A 'Going Further' section at the end of each chapter in which the authors provide you with an annotated reading list for further research and study.
- Student activities which ask you to apply the chapter's concept(s) to a range of media. The student activities include model essay or exam questions and short projects which allow you and your fellow students to put theory into practice by applying specific concepts to an array of media content, media technologies or media contexts.

A number of the chapters contain actual detailed examples of how researchers engage in textual, discursive or ideological analyses of specific media texts.

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These step-by-step examples of content analysis will prove invaluable to the student reader who is keen to engage in his or her own analysis of a media text.

Organization of the textbook

In some respects, compiling a media studies textbook is not too far removed from the processes involved in the production of other forms of media content, for example, a radio/television news programme or a magazine or newspaper. All of these activities involve the active selection (and de-selection) of content in order to fit within the particular theme or focus that a producer or editor has in mind. Your textbook is no exception. The commissioning and selection of the chapters for *Media Studies: Key Issues and Debates* was shaped by two related sets of concerns. First, I was interested in including contributions that had a focus on investigating the media in a *social context*. Second, I commissioned chapters, which took account of the tripartite model of media analysis focusing on the *production, content* and *reception* of media texts (See Devereux, 2003 for an elaboration). This holistic approach to media analysis recognizes the importance of examining media texts in terms of their initial production context, their content and their reception by audience members. The production, content and reception model asks us to place the initial creation or production of a media text, the contents of the text and its reception by audience members on an equal footing. All three approaches are complimentary and, taken together, they offer us the best chance to understand the mass media more critically.

The sequence of chapters in this textbook follows the production, content and reception model, as do many of the book's individual contributions. A further unifying theme of all 16 contributions to this textbook is the recognition that the social world continues to be a divided and unequal world. Inequalities in terms of class, disability, ethnicity/race, gender, region and sexuality are all of significance in terms of shaping access to, and the experiences of, the mass media. The mass media are inextricably bound in the perpetuation of unequal relationships of power. All is not lost however, as many of the contributions to this textbook demonstrate – there are an increasing number of possibilities open to audience members in terms of exercising their agency and countering dominant discourses or ideologies. While Habermas's public sphere may just be a tantalizing possibility, there is some evidence to suggest that in an age of media globalization and conglomeration more modest public sphericules are emerging.

Key themes

Media Studies: Key Issues and Debates begins with an essay by Natalie Fenton in which she examines the long-standing tensions between critical political economy and cultural studies approaches to media analysis. Recognizing the importance of the production, content and reception model, Fenton demonstrates that there are significant benefits to be gained by combining elements of both approaches. In appreciating the sociological significance of the media we need to examine both the powerful forces, which shape media content, and the hermeneutic or interpretative work engaged in by audience members. The textual turn so much favoured within cultural studies approaches can benefit greatly from questions emanating from the political economy tradition and vice-versa.

The vast power of global media conglomerates is the focus of the following two chapters. David Croteau and William Hoynes adopt a critical political economy perspective in examining the implications of the increased levels of ownership concentration and conglomeration within the global media industry. Michael J. Breen, working from a Marxist perspective, takes this theme further in attempting to decipher the hyperbole surrounding new media and new media technologies. While both chapters point to the possibilities that new media technologies offer *some* audience members to become media producers themselves, these possibilities have to be set against the sheer magnitude of the 'Big 5' multi-media conglomerates and the reality of the global digital divide which still persists (see Bagdikian, 2004).

Much student work within the field of media studies begins with the analysis of content. Analyses focused on ideology have fallen out of favour with many, to be replaced with an emphasis on *discourse*. The following three chapters (Chapter 4, 5 and 6) explore a range of methods which are used by media researchers in order to understand more about the intricacies of media content. How we approach the analysis of media content is evidently the site of considerable debate and controversy within the field. Should we examine media content on its own or should such analyses be undertaken in the light of analyses of production and reception?

Phillipa Smith and Allan Bell explain what discourse analysis is all about. They highlight the many pitfalls which are endemic to analyses of content focused on the increasingly popular (but difficult) method of discourse analysis. Using an exemplary case study of print media coverage of whaling in New Zealand, they demonstrate how discourse analysis can be best utilized.

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Both Greg Philo and Jenny Kitzinger argue for the continued importance of examining media texts in terms of their production, content and reception. Philo takes issue with discourse analysis in Chapter 5. In writing about the work of the Glasgow University Media Group he restates the importance of recognizing the ideological dimensions of media content. Focusing on the contentious issue of embryo research, Kitzinger discusses the usefulness of framing analysis. Both contributors make a convincing case for an approach to media content that gives equal weighting to the production, content and reception of media texts.

The divided and unequal make-up of the post-modern social world has already been commented upon. Both Amanda Haynes (Chapter 7) and Joke Hermes (Chapter 8) examine the media's role in the perpetuation of unequal relationships of power. In discussing how the mass media represent ethnicity and 'race', Haynes demonstrates how media content assumes 'whiteness' and in many instances still manages to 'other' ethnic minority and majority groups. Haynes points out, however, that there are positive signs in evidence with the growth of media content made by and for ethnic minorities – a theme explored in greater detail in Chapter 16 by Karim Karim on diasporic media audiences. Hermes discusses the representation of gender in both fictional and non-fictional media settings. While changes are evident within some forms of media content, where the complexities of sexuality and gender are acknowledged, a hetero-sexist hegemony is found to still prevail.

John Corner and Pamela Shoemaker and her colleagues revisit two long-standing issues within media analysis; namely questions surrounding power and newsworthiness. Corner, in Chapter 9, examines the changing relationship between media power and political power. He shows how changes have occurred in how politicians use the media to promote themselves. These changes have gone hand-in-hand with new styles of journalistic practice as well as changing expectations amongst citizens. Shoemaker et al. (Chapter 10) discuss the debates surrounding the concept of newsworthiness. Drawing upon a major international study they argue for the continued use of the concept of 'proximity' as well as the need to make use of the concept of 'scope'.

The contributions by Peter Hughes (Chapter 11) and Kim Akass and Janet McCabe (Chapter 12) focus on texts and textual analysis and genre. Using a highly detailed case study of the renowned BBC documentary *Big Al*. Hughes painstakingly demonstrates how a textual analysis of a single media text may be undertaken. Akass and McCabe show how the concept of genre may be used to great benefit in undertaking textual analysis. Using a number of examples

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from mainstream US (and globalized) fictional television series, they show how an increasingly sophisticated (and fruitful) form of textual analysis has come to the fore. Both textual and genre analysis allow us to examine the complexities and ambiguities of media texts either as a stand-alone method or in conjunction with an analysis of production and/or audience readings.

The final four chapters focus on audiences and reception. All four share a positive view that media audiences are capable of considerable agency. In Chapter 13 Sonia Livingstone examines the interplay between the adoption of new media technologies in the home (and in the bedroom in particular) and the forging of identities in adolescence. Jeroen de Kloet and Liesbet van Zoonen are also concerned with identity politics in Chapter 14. They explore the world of those audience members who are often pathologized within media and popular discourse – the fan. Fandom is shown to have important performative and localizing dimensions.

In the penultimate chapter, Kevin Howley discusses how, in the context of a shrinking (or non-existent) public sphere, some audience members engage in the production of their own media texts for wider circulation amongst marginalized groups. Such media content may challenge the hegemonic order and is a concrete example of audience agency at work. Karim Karim's chapter on diasporic media audiences (Chapter 16) provides further evidence of this kind of activity. Globalization has resulted in the formation of hybrid identities. The technological developments, which underpin media globalization, also mean that migrant or diasporic audiences can participate in alternative media cultures, which are created by, and for, the diaspora themselves.

References

- Bagdikian, B. (2004) *The New Media Monopoly*. Boston: Beacon Press.
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