

Topic 6

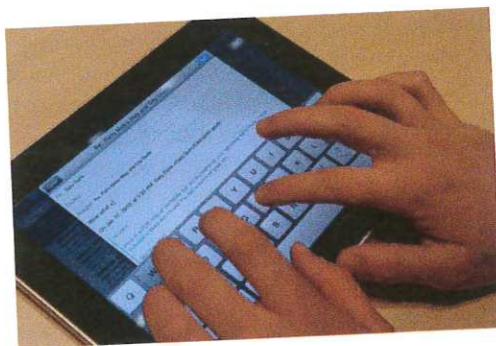
SPECIFICATION AREA

The new media and their significance for an understanding of the role of the media in contemporary society

The new media

'The new media' refers to the screen-based, digital (computer) technology involving the integration of images, text and sound, and to the technology used for the distribution and consumption of the new digitized media content which has emerged in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. These include computers, tablets, smartphones and the internet, electronic e-books, CDs, DVDs and mp3, videos and music downloaded onto mobile phones and mp3 players, email, blogs (internet diaries/journals), user-generated media content through websites such as Facebook and YouTube, and interactive video/computer games on PlayStations, Wii systems and Xboxes. Digital cable and satellite TV now offer hundreds of channels, and consumers can customize television viewing to their own individual tastes, using digiboxes, DVD recorders, catch-up TV sites (like the BBC's iPlayer), internet downloads of films to hard drives, or downloads from sites such as iTunes.

While the traditional or 'old' media involve different devices for different media content – like printed format for books, newspapers and magazines, radios and mp3 players to listen to music and radio programmes, televisions to watch shows, and phones to make calls – the new media technology often involves technological convergence, where a single device combines various media technologies. For example, the latest media technology, such as smartphones and tablet computers, like the iPad, enable users, on a single device, to make phone calls, read books, send



The new media involve digital (computer) screen-based technology, often integrating many uses into a single device, as in Apple's iPhone and iPad shown here. Traditional print and TV are now competing with the internet, as shown by the BBC website pictured here



Cultural convergence

refers to the way new media users engage with a range of media content delivered in a variety of ways, and the ways they seek out, share, and make connections between this content, and make sense of it.

text messages and emails, take photos and record videos and send them to friends or upload them to internet sites, surf the internet, play music, watch films and TV, listen to the radio, consult maps, and hundreds of other applications. Likewise, businesses and advertisers are able to communicate with millions of people at the same time through a single device. Livingstone and Bovill (1999) suggest such converging screen technologies may be contributing to the blurring of boundaries between traditionally distinct activities such as gaining or searching for information, education, working and playing games and other forms of entertainment, as people constantly switch between these different activities, or combine them at the same time.

Jenkins (2008) argues that the process of technological convergence, bringing together multiple media in the same device, has led to a much more significant process of **cultural convergence**, whereby consumers are encouraged to seek out and share new information and make connections between dispersed contents from a range of media, which the new technology makes much easier than it ever was in the past.

Features of the new media

The features of the new media discussed below also outline their main differences from the traditional media. The traditional media, like the terrestrial TV channels (such as BBC 1 and 2, ITV 1, and Channels 4 and 5), radio stations and mass-circulation printed national and Sunday newspapers and magazines, delivered their content through separate media platforms, and communicated uniform messages in a one-way process to large mass audiences. These audiences were all assumed to be homogeneous (possessing many of the same characteristics and interests). It was basically media based on a 'take it or leave it' approach, with little consumer participation or control. The technological and cultural convergence considered in the previous section has changed the way people use or consume media, with consumer needs and interests driving media content, rather than it simply being in the control of media owners and editors.

Lister et al. (2003) suggest what distinguishes the 'new' from traditional forms of (mass) media are five main concepts – digitality, interactivity, hypertextuality, dispersal, and virtuality.

Digitality

Digitality essentially means 'using computers', where all data (text, sound and pictures) are converted into numbers (binary code), which can then be stored, distributed and picked up via screen-based products, like mobile phones, DVDs, digital TVs and computers.

Interactivity

Interactivity means consumers have an opportunity to engage or interact with a variety of media, and, because of convergence, to do this at the same time, creating their own material, customizing media to their own wishes, with much greater choice compared with the passive consumption and 'take it or leave it' features of the traditional media. This interactivity on the internet has been referred to as Web 2.0, to distinguish it from the original Web 1, where users were limited to the passive viewing of content that was created for them. In Web 2.0, users collaborate and interact with one another in information- and file/video-sharing, and user-generated content, such as Wikipedia and YouTube, and through other social media such as blogs and social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter. This interactivity is also found in new digital TVs ('press the red button'), and particularly those which are also connected to the internet.

Jenkins (2008) suggests this interactivity has led to:

- **Participatory culture:** where once the media was divided into the two separate roles of editors and journalists who produced media content, and passive audiences who consumed it, producers and consumers now interact with each other. Consumers produce media content which producers consume and then incorporate into new media texts. There has, in other words, been a shift from information-reception to information-production on the part of media audiences. Jenkins suggests this gives consumers more control over media content, and he emphasizes that the circulation of new media content depends heavily on consumers' active participation.

Participatory culture refers to a media culture in which the public do not act as consumers only, but also as contributors or producers of media content. This new culture, as it relates to the internet, has been described as Web 2.0.

- **Collective intelligence:** Using the new media has become a collective process, with interactivity creating a 'buzz' between users. In the new interactive media with a vast range of information from across the globe at people's disposal, Jenkins points out that 'none of us can know everything; each of us knows something; and we can put the pieces together if we pool our resources and combine our skills' (2004: 4). He calls this 'collective intelligence', and suggests this is a new source of media power, which potentially represents an alternative to that of the media owners – the Lords of the Global Village – which was discussed in Topic 1.

Web 2.0 combines these features of participatory culture and collective intelligence, whereby the internet becomes a global platform for the collaboration of a huge range of ideas and information. Very simple examples of this might be Amazon's user reviews, or TripAdvisor (www.tripadvisor.co.uk), where consumers participate in writing reviews and providing advice on hotels, resorts, flights, holiday rentals, holiday packages and travel guides they have used or visited. These build a collective intelligence about particular items or holiday services, and counter the power of the advertising companies. Websites of user groups who share similar interests or experiences – like heart disease, diabetes, etc. – and in the process build their knowledge and skills, provide further examples.

Hypertextuality

This refers to the links which form a web of connections to other bits of information, which give users a way of searching, interacting with and customizing the media for their own use.

Dispersal

This refers to the way the new media have become less centralized, more adapted to individual choices, with a huge growth of media products of all kinds, which have become a part of everyday life. The routine use of the internet for information, shopping and entertainment, email, laptop and tablet computers, interactive digital TV, social networking sites, downloadable content onto mobile phones, and podcasts to mp3 players all show how the media have penetrated into the fabric of everyday life. The production of media content itself is now becoming more generally dispersed throughout the population, rather than restricted to media professionals. For example, people are now making their own videos and posting them on the internet. In 2014, over an hour and a half of user-generated video was uploaded to YouTube every second, or 100 hours every minute, with over 6 billion hours of video viewed every month – the equivalent of almost an hour for every person on

Collective intelligence refers to the way users of new media collaborate and share knowledge, resources and skills to build a shared or group intelligence that is greater than that of any one individual.

Activity

- 1 Go to www.en.wikipedia.org and look up 'digital media', 'interactivity', 'hypertext' and 'virtual reality'. Follow the hypertext links given in Wikipedia and give two examples of contemporary media that use each of these.
- 2 Use Wikipedia to find out what a wiki is, and explain in what senses Wikipedia is an example of a wiki, and what problems this might pose for the validity of the information given.
- 3 Using Wikipedia, find out who Jean Baudrillard was, what he meant by a 'media-saturated society' and what he said about the first Gulf War.
- 4 Go to www.uk.youtube.com, do a search on sociology, and report your findings on any two sociology videos.
- 5 Explore the extent and significance of the blogosphere, by going to www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blogosphere. Identify three different types of blogs, and what people use their blogs for. See if you can find any evidence for the use of blogging by large media businesses, either in the traditional or new media.
- 6 Go to www.news.bbc.co.uk and watch the UK news headlines online, making a note of the latest headline stories. Now do the same with www.sky.com. Compare the two sets of news stories, and whether they seem to be covering the same material. What might this outline to you about how the new media influence our views of the world?

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The **blogosphere** is a collective term to describe all the online diaries or reports known as blogs.

Earth. Technorati (www.technorati.com) estimated there were 164 million blogs – internet diaries/journals – in the **blogosphere** in 2011, and this didn't include those not in the English language, and blogs are beginning to rival traditional journalism as sources of information and news.

Virtuality

This refers to the various ways people can now immerse themselves in wholly unreal interactive experiences in virtual worlds created by new technology (as in computer games), and also create for themselves imaginary identities in online communication and networking sites, like Twitter, YouTube and Facebook.

Who uses the new media?

The new media are beginning to overtake the traditional media as a means of mass communication. Internet use across Europe is now around 14 hours a week per person, compared to around 12 hours a week of TV viewing, according to a Microsoft survey. In 2014 in the UK, around 84 per cent of households had internet access, and 80 per cent of the population used the internet; 48 per cent of all adults had a social networking profile, most of them on Facebook, which was the third most frequently used site after Google and Yahoo! sites. People spent most time on Google sites (mainly YouTube). People in the UK spend an average of about 27 hours a week watching TV, compared to around 8 hours a week online using a PC or laptop and a fixed internet connection, though this is an underestimate as many use devices other than a PC or laptop to access the internet, particularly those in younger age groups who are the higher users. On average, over half of adults' waking hours are spent using media and communications services. The traditional media, like newspapers and TV, have difficulty competing with the internet for advertising income, and advertisers now spend more on internet than traditional media advertising. Many national newspapers and TV stations now have their own websites, reaching millions more people than their printed papers or TV channels do. The importance of advertising income means that increasingly websites have to appeal to mass audiences to attract advertisers. Spam (unasked-for electronic bulk messages via texting or email) is becoming a cheap means for advertisers to reach masses of people.

Stratification in the new media

Users of the new media are not a homogeneous group, sharing the same social characteristics. As in most areas of social life, there is also stratification in cyberspace, with media users differentiated by social class, gender, age and location. Jones (2010) suggests that patterns in internet access and use tend to reflect and amplify existing inequalities, with particular concern regarding some of the more vulnerable groups, such as poorer families with young children, the unemployed, the physically and socially isolated, the elderly, disabled people and those living in rural and remote areas. Dutton and Blank (2011) found 91 per cent of those with higher education had used the internet, compared to 34 per cent of those with no formal qualifications. According to the Office for National Statistics, in 2014, more than 38 million adults in Great Britain used the internet every day, but 6.4 million adults had never used the internet, and about 16 per cent of households in Great Britain did not have home internet access. Helsper (2011) showed that it is the healthy, young, well-educated people with higher incomes and professionals who had taken up broadband and were the most likely to be frequent internet users, while those with health problems, the elderly, those without educational qualifications, low-income earners and those in manual occupations were left behind. Dutton and Blank show some of these differences in internet use between social groups, as illustrated in figure 3.2.

Social class inequalities

Broadly, the middle and upper classes are the biggest users of the new media, as they can more easily afford it. Figure 3.2 shows the rate of internet use decreased in line with socio-economic



Figure 3.2 Internet users by socio-economic and demographic factors in 2013

Source: compiled with data from Dutton and Blank (2013)

status. Jones points out that around a third of the population, marked by socio-economic disadvantage intermingled with age, is more digitally excluded than the rest of the population. Those in the poorest social classes have the least access to the internet and other new media at home, as they are less able to afford it, and 65 per cent of those who are not online are in the bottom two social classes. Dutton and Blank (2013) point out that internet users remain disproportionately likely to be young, well educated and wealthy.

There is, then, evidence of a **digital divide**, between the information-rich digital haves, who have access to online information and services, and the information-poor digital have-nots. Helsper (2011) showed that a **digital underclass** was forming in Britain, with those who have lower education levels and no employment lagging far behind other groups in their access to the internet. She found such disadvantaged groups, even when they have managed to secure access, often lack the confidence and skills to fully engage with the opportunities available online. Livingstone and Wang (2011) suggest this situation may be worsening, as they found people's progress in acquiring digital skills had ceased to improve, with those from lower social classes particularly at risk. The internet is now such a normal part of life that those who lack internet access, or the skills and confidence to use it experience a form of social exclusion based on information and communication poverty which prevents them from participating in the normal activities of society.

This class difference in internet access extends across all the new media. For example, while most people now own a mobile phone, the middle class are more likely to have them on contracts than on pay-as-you-go (PAYG), and to have a smartphone, and that phone is more likely to be an Apple iPhone than any other make. BlackBerry handsets were until recently particularly popular among younger working-class adults and teens, partly because of the free BlackBerry Messenger service, and cheaper phone and network costs, with a PAYG BlackBerry costing around one quarter of the cost of a PAYG iPhone. Different social classes tend to use different social networks. For example, LinkedIn (<http://uk.linkedin.com>) is the social network of the elite, with nearly half of users saying they earn more than £50,000 a year, compared to about a quarter of Twitter users and a fifth of Facebook users.

Age differences

There is a substantial generation gap in access to and use of the new media. This is not surprising since, as Boyle (2007) points out, younger people have grown up with the latest developments in the new media, have learnt to use the internet at home, at school and from their peers, and are consequently more media-savvy than previous generations. They are, for example, more likely to consume media in a variety of formats, such as watching TV on their mobiles, laptops and iPads

The **digital divide** refers to the gap between those people with effective access to the digital and information technology making up the new media and those who lack such access.

A **digital underclass** is a group of people, mainly those from the lowest social classes, the least educated and the unemployed, who are increasingly disadvantaged in comparison to those who have full access to and use of the internet and other digital media.

Figure 3.2 Internet users by socio-economic and demographic factors 2013

Source: compiled with data from Dutton and Gunkel (2013)

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and tablets, rather than just on a TV set, and those aged 16–24 are over ten times more likely to go online via a mobile than those aged 55+. Young people have the highest levels of internet access and use, and this declines among older age groups.

However, there is also evidence of clear social inequality among young people. Jones (2010) points out that while young people have the highest levels of access and use, around 10 per cent of 16- to 24-year-olds from the most disadvantaged social backgrounds are likely to remain relatively infrequent users of the internet.

Ofcom (2012, 2014) found young people (16–24), compared to older people:

- Are greater internet users and spend more time online.
- Are more likely to have the internet at home.
- Are more likely to own and use a smartphone.
- Are more likely to use a mobile phone to go online.
- Are more attached to, aware of and confident in using new media technology.
- Tend to use the new media differently from older people: they are more likely to see the internet as a form of fun, relaxation and a pastime, through activities such as taking photos and videos, listening to music, playing games, watching video clips and webcasts, surfing the internet, and, particularly, social networking. They are also more likely to use the internet for work/studies information, entertainment and leisure information.
- Are more likely to get their news on mobile devices (rather than from TV, radio or newspapers).

Gender differences

There are some significant differences between men and women in the way they use and relate to the new media. For example, Ofcom (2011, 2012, 2014) found:

- Fixed games consoles and tablet computers are more popular among males than females, but e-readers are more popular among women for their reading
- Men spend three times as much time as women watching videos online
- There is a higher take-up of smartphones among males
- More females than males reported 'high addiction' to their mobile phones
- Young women make significantly more calls than young men and they also send and receive more texts
- Women are less likely to use the internet than men within a given three-month period, but women are slightly more likely than men to use social networking sites
- Women are less likely to use the internet to relax, or to keep up to date with news.

Li and Kirkup (2007), in a study of gender differences in the use of, and attitudes towards, the internet among Chinese and British students, suggested there are two global gender-based cultures with respect to the internet. They found that, although there are an increasing number of women going online and the gender gap in internet use may be narrowing, actual behaviour once online, such as the websites visited and reasons for searching, are still gendered. They found significant gender differences in internet experience, attitudes, usage and self-confidence. Men in both countries, compared to women, were:

- More likely to have positive attitudes towards the internet, spent more time on it, and used it more extensively
- More self-confident about their computer skills than women, and were more likely to express the opinion that using computers was a male activity and skill
- More likely to use email and chatrooms, and played more computer games
- Were less likely to use the internet for studying.

Li and Kirkup found women students underestimated their ability to use computers and the internet. For example, they more frequently reported that they had difficulty performing information-searching tasks, and that they were likely to get lost when searching the internet, although they actually performed in tests as well as their male counterparts. British women students were more

likely than men to browse the internet for research and study. Li and Kirkup's research suggests that British women students still regard the internet more as a tool rather than as the toy for personal fun and pleasure that men do.

New media and rapid social change

It should be noted that many of the social class, age and gender differences in new media use identified above are in general diminishing rapidly each year. More and more households and people are getting connected and using new media every year, and the devices they are using to go online are forever changing and expanding. New media are penetrating so deeply into everyday life that it seems likely that in the near future almost everyone will be using new media technology, even if they are reluctant to do so, as an increasing number of services are only available online.

If you want to find contemporary data about the changing use of new media, who uses it and who doesn't, what they use it for and differences between users, it is worth taking a look at the Oxford Internet Surveys website (<http://oxis.oii.ox.ac.uk>) or at Ofcom's annual *Communications Market Report* (<http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/market-data-research/market-data/communications-market-reports>)

Location, and the global digital divide

The most significant digital divide in terms of location is that between the information-rich and the information-poor countries, and the existence of a global digital underclass. The new media, and particularly the internet, are used most heavily and by the largest proportion of people in the Western world. Many of those living in the world's poorest countries lack access due to poverty. The poorest countries lack the resources to build the digital networks required, and private businesses

The digital divide

According to www.internetworldstats.com, between 2000 and June 2015 world internet usage grew by around 900 per cent, and, by the end of June 2015, around 3.2 billion people used the internet – only about 45 per cent of the world's population. Europe and North America made up 28 per cent of the world's internet users, even though these areas comprise just 16 per cent of the world's population. This contrasts with 9.5 per cent of the world's internet users in Africa, which makes up about 16 per cent of the world's population. This evidence suggests a clear global digital divide in terms of access to the new media.

Figure 3.3 shows the digital divide in internet access at the end of June 2014; even in Europe, there are divisions between the 95 per cent of people in Norway having internet access and the 51 per cent in Romania.

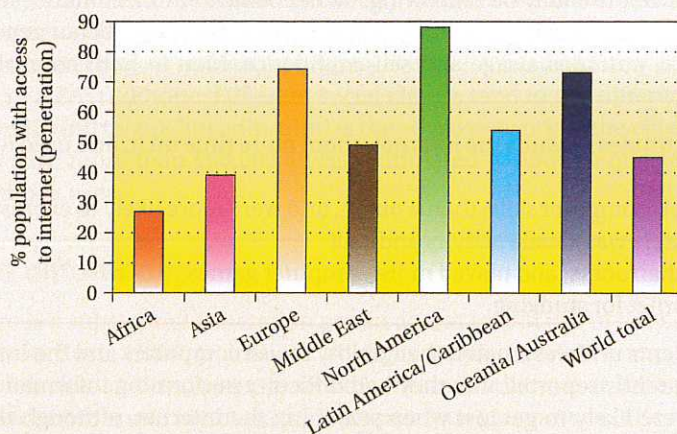


Figure 3.3 Worldwide internet access, June 2015

Source: compiled with data from www.internetworldstats.com.

won't provide them as there aren't enough customers willing or able to pay enough for them to make a profit. Language and cultural barriers can also be a problem, as about 85 per cent of websites are in English, and most web content is generated in the USA and Western Europe. This creates global inequalities, and a new digital underclass who are excluded from the new media. The box 'The digital divide' illustrates this.

The effects of new media and new technologies on traditional or 'old' media

All the traditional media companies, like News Corporation and the terrestrial TV and newspaper companies, are massively involved in the new media – part of the horizontal integration and cross-media ownership that was discussed in Topic 1. This means there is a form of *synergy* between the traditional and new media, as they support and interact with one another. Newspapers, for example, often refer readers to their websites and many printed newspaper reports now appear first on those websites.

The most obvious impact of the new media and new technologies on the traditional media is the huge decline in printed newspaper sales, and a general downwards trend in viewing of TV news bulletins. This contrasts with a huge increase in web traffic, and all the major TV channels, magazines and newspapers now have related websites, whose online readerships far exceed the circulation of their printed formats. There is therefore some convergence between the traditional and new media, as is explored further in this section.

Changes influencing traditional media

Some of the changes arising from the development and growth of new media which have had an impact on the traditional media include:

- Cheaper, more mobile and widely accessible digital technologies, such as smartphones, smaller video cameras, satellite video phones and the range of internet-based technologies like email and social networking sites
- Technologies expanding 'live' coverage, such as mobile phone picture and video recording at the scene of a news event, and their transmission to news organizations
- Use of the new media to form the content of the traditional media, with newspapers, magazines and TV using the internet, including the blogosphere and citizen journalism, for research and ideas, and bloggers and other citizen journalists publishing original news reports, commentary and criticism, which may get included in mainstream media reports
- Online criticisms of mainstream news output
- The development of online newsrooms in traditional media
- Engagement with the interactive aspects of new media, such as email, social networks, professional journalist blogs and online feedback on traditional media articles.

The effects of changes on traditional media

Bivens (2008) suggests the developments outlined in the previous section have led to three significant changes in the traditional journalism of the 'old' media:

- 1 *Shifts in traditional news flow cycles.* News production depends on a flow of reports of newsworthy items from individuals and groups. The rise of citizen journalism, whereby members of the public – rather than professional journalists and media companies – collect, report and spread news stories, has created not only a huge increase in the quantity of information, but also an increased speed of flow of news. An article or item posted by an online journalist or blogger in one part of the world immediately becomes part of a global system accessible to anyone with a laptop or smartphone. The traditional media (as well as new media organizations)

no longer control the flow of information, and need to respond regularly to this increased flow of news from citizen journalists. This increased flow means journalists have less time to process the news, particularly within the 24-hour cycles of traditional print media, and the much shorter cycles of TV rolling news.

- 2 *Heightened accountability.* Citizen journalism has made traditional media and media organizations much more accountable to the public, as their reports are scrutinized by the public, and responded to or criticized through online blogs or comments pages on online newspapers, or television web pages, or flak-producing campaigns if they produce distorted, biased or inaccurate reports. News organizations are now more aware of their accountability to audiences, and often use their related websites to offer more interactivity and transparency.
- 3 *Evolving news values.* Some important news values influencing what to report and what not to, include importance, interest, entertainment and proximity, along with the sense of immediacy (being there now – live!) reinforced by the impact of photos and video. In the highly competitive media market, all media need to give people the impression that they are, at all times, on top of everything that’s going on around the world. The new media have enabled news organizations, including traditional TV media, to provide more immediacy through instantaneous live coverage, provided by citizen journalists from areas like battle-zones which traditional journalists might find hard to access, or through technology like video phones. News values may be changing, as traditional media are incorporating ‘non-professional’ material, like mobile phone and YouTube videos and citizen reports.

The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (2015) suggested the growing use of new media technology like smartphones and tablets to access news has meant that traditional news outlets, like TV and printed newspapers, face an increasingly uphill struggle to make money, as many of those accessing news are via referrals from social media on smartphones and tablets. This leads to a growing concentration of power in the hands of the providers of new media technology platforms, giving corporations like Facebook, Google and Apple increasing control over news agendas at the expense of traditional news organizations.

The reduced power of ownership? Agenda-setting and a shift from top-down control to cultural chaos

McNair (2006) suggests the new media have meant that elite groups have less power to influence news agendas. Top-down control by media owners, managers and editors and by primary definers (see page 210), as discussed in Topics 1 and 3, is replaced by what he calls ‘cultural chaos’ – more anarchy, disruption, dissent, openness and diversity. The balance of power of media control is shifting, as citizen journalists – through blogging, tweeting, the uploading of videos to YouTube, through videos and photos sent to traditional media, and through social networks such as Facebook – have growing power to influence the news that is reported by traditional media. This has undermined the influence of media owners, and has given more power to ordinary people to spread their interpretations of events that happen in the world.

Agenda-setting, as Philo (2012) suggests, means the media can influence what we do *not* think about, by removing issues from public discussion by simply avoiding them. He points out that it can be very difficult to criticize a dominant media account – and most of these are still provided for most people by TV and newspapers – if there is little access to alternative sources of information. However, citizen journalism has a rising capacity to shape traditional news agendas. These online reports are potentially viewed by huge global audiences, and traditional media cannot afford to ignore items which are made newsworthy by citizen journalists. For example, Bivens cites BBC deputy editor Daniel Pearl’s claim that the blogosphere had ‘an immediate impact on Newsnight’s running order’.

Bivens, though, suggests that this shift in power is only slight, and elite groups are adapting and will likely continue to find ways of shaping news output. She suggests news organizations retain the power to limit debate and preserve narrow news agendas, and points to the way dissenting views and radical critiques of both foreign and domestic policies remain rare among mainstream news accounts despite their popularity online. Philo’s study of the way the traditional media responded to the global banking crisis from 2008 onwards (see pages 188 and 204) is a good illustration of this.

The rise of churnalism and infotainment

The rise of churnalism (see page 211) and infotainment (see page 190) in the traditional media is a consequence of cost-cutting by media owners, and their attempts to attract audiences and advertisers in a hugely competitive global media market. This is coupled with the time pressures arising from the intensity of 24/7 rolling news in the context of ever-expanding new media, and the changing news flow cycles discussed above.

Changing relationships with media audiences

As discussed above, the new media have forced traditional media to be more accountable and responsive to their audiences, allowing more interactive comment, feedback and complaints, and more personalized, customized content suited to their tastes. They have also had to become more responsive in the way content is delivered, such as through multiple delivery devices, like smartphones, laptops and tablets, and interactive/internet-enabled TVs, and for multiple formats – for example, Twitter, Facebook, SMS, and websites, with everything available, everywhere and at all times suited to their audiences. New media technology, such as smartphones and tablets, are increasingly becoming the preferred choice of readers and viewers, particularly younger ones, to consume news. They also want to ‘snack’ more, in terms of both the time they spend and the type of content they consume, and they want to do so more frequently throughout the day, rather than being dependent on fixed-time television and printed newspapers. This changing way consumers access content and news was reflected in the launching in the UK in 2015 of Apple News, a news app which aggregates digital news media, in partnership with fourteen UK newspaper and magazine publishers. This reflected the need for traditional media owners to ensure they adapted to the changing needs of consumers and how they consume content. The Reuters Institute (Newman and Levy 2014) found over one-third of 18–24-year-olds in ten developed countries say they now use smartphones as their primary means of accessing the news. This partly explains why traditional media are increasingly turning to infotainment, websites and apps to supplement their traditional printed or televised formats.

The significance of the new media in contemporary society

Curran and Seaton (2010) suggest there are two general views on the new media’s significance in contemporary society:

- 1 The *cultural optimist view*– which sees the new media as playing a positive role in society. This is held by neophiliacs – those who like, rapidly embrace and adapt to new technology and are avid users of new media.
- 2 The *cultural pessimist view*– which has a more negative view of the impact of new media in society.

The cultural optimist/neophilic view of the new media

More informed consumers, wider choices and more user participation

In July 2013, UK media audiences had a choice of over 500 digital terrestrial, satellite and cable TV channels, and, according to Netcraft (<http://news.netcraft.com/>), there were about 172 million active websites of all kinds in September 2015. News, information, shopping, a wide range of financial transactions and social networking are all now available online, and accessible through a range of different devices. Consumers can now access information, complaints and reviews about practically anything that interests them, making them better informed and offering them greater choice than ever before in history. Interactive digital TV, online news sites, blogging, tweeting and citizen journalism, video- and photo-sharing websites like YouTube, and social networking sites are all giving consumers more opportunities to participate in using and producing media content. User-generated sites like Blogger (www.blogger.com), WordPress (www.wordpress.com) or Trip Advisor (www.tripadvisor.co.uk) enable ordinary people, rather than just professional experts, to

offer advice and make online reports and criticisms, and to learn from the experiences of fellow consumers in all spheres of life.

Greater democracy

Democracy here refers to two aspects:

- 1 *The narrower political aspect*, concerned with the empowerment of people – their rights and ability to control, influence, protest at and organize against governments, and their opportunities to initiate change in society.
- 2 *The wider conception of democracy* as the right to freedom of ideas and expression.

Neophiliacs argue that the new media can give more power to ordinary people, and have made positive contributions to building more democratic societies.

The new media have meant there is now a vast ocean of information available to all, and, as McNair (2006) says, ‘information, like knowledge, is power’. McNair argues the internet means anyone – not just large media corporations – with a computer or smartphone and an internet connection can set up and maintain a blog or website, which can be visited and viewed by anyone, anywhere in the world, at any time. There are greater opportunities to report, criticize and comment than ever before. For example, ordinary people can now publish their thoughts on Twitter (www.twitter.com), attack those in power on Blogger (www.blogger.com) and report on events excluded from other mainstream media by sending their own news stories and photos to citizen journalism sites like Demotix (www.demotix.com), or uploading videos shot on mobile phones to YouTube.

Social movements and campaigns now use the new media to spread their ideas, build support and coordinate protests, like a kind of rolling conversation that can build up over time. Protest and campaigning websites – for example, Occupy (www.occupytogether.org), ROAR (www.roarmag.org), ALL OUT (www.allout.org), 38 degrees (www.38degrees.org.uk), Avaaz (www.avaaz.org/en), Wikileaks (www.wikileaks.org), the Coalition of Resistance (www.coalitionofresistance.wordpress.com) and numerous Facebook groups, such as Europeans against the political system (www.facebook.com/eatps) – have enabled protest groups to reach a worldwide audience very rapidly in ways never before possible, and have promoted a culture of questioning, challenging and holding to account elite hierarchies, and the power, authority and secrecy of governments and other organizations. For example, in 2014 Sheffield United Football Club were forced (on the club’s own admission) by an intensive social media campaign and online petition to withdraw an offer to allow former player and convicted rapist Ched Evans to train with them. This has put more power into the hands of ordinary people and makes those holding power more accountable for their actions and decisions.

Public outrage can bring corporate and government websites to their knees, by ‘denial of service’ cyberattacks which flood websites with such huge amounts of traffic that they slow them down to such an extent that they crash and become unavailable to legitimate visitors.

Bloggers and other citizen journalists can exert a major influence on the mainstream media’s content and agenda, by using social media to post their own reports or by responding to what might be seen as biased or distorted mainstream media output. This makes it increasingly difficult for mainstream newspapers, TV channels and websites to ignore stories they might have dropped in the past. For example, video shot on a mobile phone by a protester at a London demonstration in April 2009 provided evidence that it was police brutality that contributed to the death of an English newspaper vendor, Ian Tomlinson, which the police had tried to cover up before the video emerged. This forced the mainstream media to accept the protesters’ version of events, rather than that of the police. As McNair puts it, ‘neither editors nor proprietors call the shots on content any more’.

The new media, particularly the social networking media of Web 2.0, have become key tools in mobilizing people to fight against oppressive and corrupt regimes across the world, with some regimes toppled by revolutions driven in part by the fast-acting power of the internet, Twitter, YouTube and mobile phone technology. The mobile phone has become one of the most potent weapons in the hands of protesters, as images are uploaded and rebroadcast to a global audience of millions. For example, new media and new technology were crucial in the ‘Arab Spring’ – a series of uprisings against oppressive and dictatorial regimes in the Arab world which began in Spring 2011. Video and photos shot on mobile phones showing evidence of violent acts of repression, torture,

How might mobile phone technology be used to give more power to ordinary people, and expose wrongdoing by the already powerful?



atrocities and killing of protesters by the regimes were uploaded to YouTube and viewed by global audiences and the newsrooms of global media. Twitter and Facebook were also used to coordinate and publicize protests. These uprisings were consequently sometimes referred to as the 'Facebook revolutions'. In March 2012, *Kony 2012*, a 30-minute YouTube video exposing the plight of children in Uganda at the hands of the warlord Joseph Kony (http://youtu.be/c_Ue6REkeTA), rapidly went viral, and was viewed 100 million times in the first week. Such examples show how the new media can be used by those wishing to protest and receive coverage outside the control of established media and media organizations.

More access to all kinds of information

As seen in Topic 2, everyone now has access to huge amounts of information from all over the world, including access to high culture which was formerly limited to educated elites.

Social media sites enable news and information articles from a wide range of sources to be brought to the attention of others who may have missed them. This potentially gives people more power in society and in their daily lives, as they can gain access to information for themselves rather than relying on others for it. An everyday example might be people being able to gain more information about their health conditions by sharing information with online patient groups, or being able to check symptoms of illness online, through websites like NHS Choices (www.nhs.uk/Pages/HomePage.aspx), Netdoctor (www.netdoctor.co.uk) or Patient UK (www.patient.co.uk), and also to check any risks associated with prescribed medicines they have been given. This gives patients more power through information rather than them being solely dependent on doctors. Such information, and consequent empowerment of individuals, is available on practically all aspects of everyday life.

The world becomes a global village

As discussed in Topic 2, 'the global village' is a term used by McLuhan (1962) to describe how the digitized new media collapse space and time barriers in human communication, and allow users from around the world to connect and interact with each other instantaneously, making the world like one village or community. In this global village, the new media promote cultural diversity, national barriers are reduced, the boundaries between the local and the global are blurred, and different peoples and cultures are brought together, promoting greater understanding between different cultures.

Social life and social interaction is enhanced

Postmodernists see the new media as contributing to social diversity, and enabling people to share in globalized cultures, and to build and shape their identities and to make lifestyle choices in a media-saturated society.

The really significant change of social media is the way the web has enabled people to expand their personal boundaries beyond geographical area and immediate social connections. The new media have opened up new channels for communication and interaction, enhancing or supplementing existing face-to-face interactions. Factors like gender, age, ethnicity and social class, combined with separation by geographical distance, might once have meant some conversations in the real world might have been avoided or impossible to have, but alternative identities can be constructed in cyberspace or virtual worlds, and the media may become part of the means by which people express themselves. People can stay in touch via email, Facebook or Twitter when they are away, or meet anonymously in chatrooms or social networking sites, encounters which may develop into face-to-face meetings. Social networking and sharing sites, such as YouTube, Facebook and Flickr (www.flickr.com), and 'Googling' friends can enhance social networks, re-establish lost contacts between old friends, create online communities and bring people together from all over the world. Social networking accounts for more than a fifth of all time spent on the internet. According to Ofcom (2014), Facebook had around 36 million unique visitors per month in the UK in the year ending March 2014 – 56 per cent of the population and about two-thirds of the entire online audience – and more than five times as much time is spent on Facebook than on any other single internet site, equivalent to more than two-and-a-half hours a month for every person in the UK. In June 2013, there were around 24 million daily active users in the UK logging in to Facebook.

The cultural pessimist view of the new media

The cultural pessimist view is held by those who believe that the neophiliacs have exaggerated the benefits of the new media, and ignored or underestimated their negative aspects.

Problems of the validity of information

It is often difficult to know the source of messages in the new media – who they come from and who is sending them. It is therefore often hard to validate information – to know whether or not reports are true, and whether videos and photos are faked or doctored. For example, videos and images posted to Facebook or YouTube, or Twitter feeds (tweets), may appear to show the violent suppression of protest by repressive regimes. While this may be a good thing when protesters have no other means of publicizing their struggles, at the same time there may be no journalists, TV crews or independent witnesses on the ground to verify whether the images and tweets are real, faked or exaggerated, or to interview the people concerned. Similarly, much so-called 'factual' public information on the internet is often little more than disguised advertising for products. As suggested in the discussion of churnalism in Topic 3, such material is often recycled without checking the information or sources. The viral *Kony 2012* YouTube film mentioned above was criticized for, among other things, oversimplifying the issue, for deflecting attention away from atrocities committed by the Ugandan army, for failing to mention the fact that Kony had left Uganda six years before the film appeared, and for focusing too much on the views of white Western people and ignoring the views of local (black) people. Such criticisms are unlikely to have come to the attention of the millions of people who viewed the original video.

Cultural and media imperialism

Cultural and media imperialism is the idea that the new media, particularly the internet, satellite television and global advertising, have led to the imposition on non-Western cultures of Western, and especially American, cultural values, with the undermining of local cultures and cultural independence. This was discussed in Topic 2 (see pages 195–8), and you may wish to re-read those pages now.

A threat to democracy

The neophiliacs see the new media, and particularly the internet, as a means whereby millions of ideas can blossom and different schools of thought can debate, and see this as giving more information and power to the once powerless. However, critics suggest neophiliacs underestimate the threat to democracy posed by the new media corporations, and the impact of the digital divide,

which restricts access to the new technology, particularly among the poorest and most oppressed people in the world.

The power of unelected commercial companies: the sovereigns of cyberspace

As the internet becomes more central to our lives, the power of the commercial companies providing the technology and web services increases. This poses a threat to democracy and enhances the power of the already powerful, as more and more of what we know is dominated and controlled by global corporations. MacKinnon (2012) uses the concept of what she calls 'sovereigns of cyberspace' to describe the power of giant multinational corporations like Amazon, Apple, Facebook, Google, Microsoft, Samsung and Vodafone to control internet access, satellite channels, social networking and mobile technology. MacKinnon suggests such companies, among the largest and richest in the world, now hold the kind of power over us that was once held only by governments. These companies are now effectively part of our political system, but they are neither elected by nor accountable to the public in the way democratic governments are, and exercise what Curran and Seaton (2010) call 'power without responsibility'.

These private companies have enormous power to stifle free expression, and they actually use it. For example, in 2011 Amazon removed Wikileaks from its cloud computing servers without any justification that would have withstood a legal challenge, after Wikileaks released secret emails allegedly posing a threat to the US government, and other websites and finance companies attempted to starve Wikileaks of funds by blocking online donations from being made by Visa, Mastercard and Paypal. Facebook may be used to spread political and other potentially controversial views, but Facebook took down a page used by activists in the Arab Spring to co-ordinate protests on the grounds that they had violated the company's rules by not using their real names, which would have endangered the lives of those activists. Google has the power to render any website effectively invisible by blocking it in its search engine.

Censorship and control

MacKinnon (2012) demonstrates how some undemocratic, repressive regimes, like those in China and Iran, monitor and control new media use. The internet, and particularly social networking sites and email, face government censorship and surveillance using web filtering/blocking and surveillance technology often supplied by Western technology companies, which can monitor email and web traffic and block access to websites. For example, the majority of China's social networks employ content management teams to censor messages which might cause political problems with the government. Western democracies, such as the UK and the USA, are increasingly using the same surveillance technologies, with the British government in 2014 proposing more cyber-surveillance, with laws to monitor the content of emails, social networks and Skype traffic. In 2013, the US whistleblower Edward Snowden revealed that the British government's eavesdropping agency, GCHQ, was conducting a secret surveillance operation – Project Tempora – involving a huge data-trawling of internet traffic, emails, phone calls and Facebook and other postings, including those of wholly innocent citizens, raising major concerns over privacy and illegal government surveillance activity.

As seen above, major corporations dominate the web, and despite all the claims of enhanced democracy by the neophiliacs, the vast majority of websites, and particularly those that get the most hits and the most advertising, carry mainstream material and online comments that are within the dominant ideology. The Reuters Institute (Newman and Levy 2014) found that in 2014 the majority of news consumed online still comes from established newspaper and broadcasting companies, and that much of the conversation in social media is driven by the work of mainstream journalists. Websites criticizing the status quo, calling for social and political change or promoting minority views are under-resourced, don't attract (or don't want) advertising, and are marginalized. They are swamped by the sheer extent of large, well-resourced websites filled with news, advertising, entertainment, sports and commercial sales run by corporations who seek to ensure that their view of the world, and their interests, are those that prevail. In many ways, the issues of ownership and control, government controls over the media, the social construction of the news and agenda-setting, which were discussed in Topics 1 and 3, are applicable as much – or more – to the new media as they ever were to the traditional or old media.

The lack of regulation

The global nature of the new media, such as the internet and satellite broadcasting, means there is a lack of regulation by national bodies like Ofcom. This means undesirable things like bias, internet crime, pornography (including child pornography), drug smuggling, paedophilia, people trafficking, identity theft, cybercrime, money-laundering, terrorism, violence and racism, and undesirable media representations like those discussed in Topic 4, including those which are illegal in the UK under equalities laws, can thrive virtually unchecked, alongside things like addiction to online gambling. In 2014–15, there were growing concerns about the way a terrorist group like ISIS (Islamic State), which had seized large areas of land in Syria and Iraq, could use new media to conduct a high-tech media jihad (holy war). ISIS was highly skilled and successful in using social media like YouTube, Twitter, Instagram and Tumblr to advertise itself globally. It was using techniques taken from movies, video games and news channels to spread its message and to create a network of militants recruited from all over the world (including the UK) and to frighten and intimidate people with uploaded videos of beheadings. Other undesirable effects include cyber bullying, in which individuals are bullied online through social networking sites or email or on mobile phones, and from which it is difficult for victims to escape, unlike other forms of bullying. Twitter, particularly, has come in for a lot of criticism as individuals and their families have faced vitriolic abuse, and rape and death threats from those disagreeing with their views.

Commercialization and limited consumer choice

For all the alleged benefits claimed by the culturally optimistic neophiliacs, the new media are essentially driven by consumerism and commercialization. The new media are about making money for the companies that produce the technology, who provide the internet connections, who provide the websites and services, and for those that advertise to sell their products and services. Internet and mobile phone advertising is now a bigger business than advertising in the traditional media. Social networking sites are not really about connecting people together, but are just a means of targeting advertising at people who spend extraordinary lengths of time freely giving away to advertisers detailed information about their lives and interests. This is a form of commercial surveillance, storing information about consumer preferences, through cookies left on their computers and mobiles, to bombard them with adverts offering products and other sites to visit based on their past browsing habits and online purchases.

There is no real increase in consumer choice

The digital divide means that there are still many people, both in the UK and worldwide, who are unable to access the alleged increased consumer choices made available via the new media. However, many cultural pessimists suggest there is no real increase in consumer choice. Preston (2012), for example, points out that, while digital media offer customers the choice of what they want to read or look at, they don't bring to their attention – unlike newspapers or TV – the stories that people didn't know they wanted to be informed about until they had seen them in newspapers or on TV. There may theoretically be more choice, but if people rely for their news, for example, on recommendations from like-minded friends and contacts on social media, it could mean they are consuming less news and that they are no longer exposed to a broader news agenda. Barnett and Seymour (1999) and Curran et al. (2009) showed how there is poorer-quality media content, with a 'dumbing-down' and tabloidization of popular culture to attract large audiences, much of the same content on different TV channels, and endless repeats. Celebrity culture has replaced serious programming, and 'infotainment' (information wrapped up to entertain) has replaced hard news reporting to encourage people to consume media. These issues have been discussed throughout this chapter, but particularly in Topics 1, 2 and 3.

Increasing surveillance

The new media have increased all kinds of surveillance in everyday life. Apart from the surveillance by advertisers mentioned earlier, there are endless examples of how the new media have operated to increase social control. For example, in 2012, a woman was jailed for twenty-one weeks for

racially aggravated harassment and abuse after she was filmed on a mobile phone racially abusing fellow travellers on the London tube, which was uploaded to YouTube and viewed more than 200,000 times. In America, a teacher lost her job after a parent spotted a Facebook picture of her with a glass of wine in one hand and a beer in the other. A North Yorkshire police constable has used Twitter, Facebook and YouTube to post pictures and videos of graffiti and appeal to local residents for help in catching the culprits. The Metropolitan Police used a facial-recognition smartphone app to identify people suspected of committing crimes in the 2011 London riots, which allowed users who had the app to inform on people they saw by sending a name and address to the police.

While some might see these examples as a welcome use of the new media, such surveillance techniques can also be used by those with power to monitor and control social protesters, and to highlight and condemn all forms of non-conformist behaviour. Surveillance is actually an integral part of mobile phone technology, as the mobile signal can be used to locate mobile users, enabling the agencies of social control to find out where people are. These agencies also have the means of monitoring who is posting information online, and communications between individuals and groups.

The undermining of human relationships and communities

There will be an increase in social isolation, with people losing the ability to communicate in the real world as they spend less quality time having conversations with family and friends, and more wrapped up in the virtual world of solitary electronic media. There will consequently be a loss of **social capital** or the useful social networks which people have, as they spend less time engaging with the communities and neighbourhoods in which they live.

Social capital refers to the social networks of influence and support that people have.

Activity

- 1 Outline **three** ways in each case in which the new media may have (a) undermined, and (b) increased, the power and control of media owners and organizations.
- 2 Outline **three** ways in each case in which the new media may have (a) increased, and (b) decreased, consumer choice.
- 3 Visit some or all of the following websites, and describe the extent to which you think they present different views of the world from that found in the traditional media or in mainstream new media
www.occupytogether.org
www.roarmag.org
www.38degrees.org.uk
www.avaaz.org/en
www.opendemocracy.net
www.allout.org

Practice questions

- 1 Outline and explain **two** ways in which the new media have affected traditional newspapers and broadcast media. (10 marks)
- 2 Read **Item A** below and answer the question that follows.

Item A

New media technology has enabled a significant growth in citizen journalism, in which ordinary people rather than media professionals produce media content. This has taken some control of media content away from owners and editors, and made traditional media and media organizations more accountable to the public.

Applying material from **Item A**, analyse two ways in which the new media may have taken control of media content away from owners and editors, and placed it in the hands of media users. (10 marks)

- 3 Read **Item B** below and answer the question that follows.

Item B

The new media have enabled ordinary people to access and report, criticize, comment on and share more news and information than ever before. This has promoted a culture of questioning, challenging and holding to account the power, decisions and actions of elite hierarchies, governments and other organizations. Ordinary people consequently have more power in society.

Applying material from **Item B** and your knowledge, evaluate the impact of the new media on contemporary society. (20 marks)

CHAPTER SUMMARY AND REVISION CHECKLIST

After studying this chapter you should be able to:

- Explain what is meant by the media, and distinguish between the traditional and new media
- Identify formal controls on the media
- Identify a range of ways in which governments seek to influence and control media output
- Examine the view that the media reproduce an ideological view of the world
- Critically discuss the main features of media ownership and control, and how these influence the content of the media, including the strengths and weaknesses of the manipulative or instrumentalist approach, the dominant ideology or hegemonic approach, and the pluralist approach
- Consider competing views of the role of the mass media in relation to globalization and popular culture, including the meaning of media and cultural imperialism
- Explain and evaluate the postmodernist approach to the media
- Identify and discuss the influences on the content of the media, and the issue of media bias
- Discuss a range of ways in which the news is socially constructed, the significance of agenda-setting and gatekeeping, and the factors that make stories newsworthy
- Explain how the media can generate moral panics and amplify deviance
- Explain what is meant by 'infotainment', 'tabloidization' and 'churnalism', and why they have become significant features of the media
- Explain what is meant by the 'propaganda model' of the media
- Describe and critically discuss a range of media representations and stereotypes, including those related to age, social class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and disability
- Critically discuss the effects of the media, including the methodological problems of researching these effects, and the strengths and weaknesses of the hypodermic syringe, the two-step flow, the cultural effects (including encoding/decoding, reception analysis and selective filtering) and the uses and gratifications models



- Discuss and evaluate the effects of violence in the media, including the methodological problems of researching this
- Discuss uses of the new media, stratification by social class, age, gender and location in new media access and use, how the new media and

new technologies have affected the traditional media and consider a range of neophilic and cultural pessimist arguments and evidence concerning the significance of the new media in contemporary society, including the extent to which these have reduced the power of media owners.

KEY TERMS

Definitions can be found in the glossary at the end of this book, as well as these terms being defined in the margin where they first appear in the chapter

agenda-setting	gatekeeping	impairment	polysemic
bias	glass ceiling	Islamophobia	primary definers
blogosphere	global culture	low culture	preferred (dominant)
churnalism	global village	male gaze	reading
citizen journalism	globalization	mass culture	popular culture
collective intelligence	Hawthorne effect	media gaze	sexual orientation
cultural convergence	hegemony	media imperialism	sexuality
cultural homogenization	heterosexuality	media representations	simulacra
cultural imperialism	hierarchy of credibility	media text	stigmatized identity
deviancy amplification	high culture	moral panic	social capital
digital divide	homosexuality	negotiated reading	social media
digital underclass	hybrid culture	neophiliacs	symbolic annihilation
disability	hybridization	news values	synergy
dominant ideology	hyperreality	norm-setting	tabloidization
elite	ideological state	oppositional reading	technological
false consciousness	apparatuses	participatory culture	convergence
folk devils	ideology	pluralism	

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PRACTICE QUESTION

Topic B3 The Media

Answer **all** the questions on this topic

Time allowed: 1 hour

1 | 9 Outline and explain **two** ways in which the media may have contributed to the emergence of a global popular culture. **[10 marks]**

2 | 0 Read **Item A** below and answer the question that follows.

Item A

Many people spend more time on social media (networking) sites than any other online or internet-related activity. Social media have become an extremely significant form of the media in the twenty-first century, sometimes rivalling more traditional mass media in their ability to get their views across to large media audiences.

Applying material from **Item A**, analyse **two** ways in which social media may be changing traditional forms of the mass media. **[10 marks]**

2 | 1 Read **Item B** below and answer the question that follows.

Item B

Rather than being a neutral record of events that have happened, media news is socially constructed by a range of complex social influences and processes of interpretation, selection and presentation. Some suggest media news is a series of socially manufactured propaganda messages produced within the context of the dominant ideology to protect the interests of the most powerful groups in society.

Applying material from **Item B** and your knowledge, evaluate the view that mainstream media news is socially constructed and protects the interests of the most powerful groups in society. **[20 marks]**