A-Level Sociology

A Resource-Based Learning Approach

The Mass Media and Popular Culture: Ownership and Control

Introduction

As I suggested in the previous Media Notes ("Technological Development"), an understanding of patterns of ownership and control is crucial to our understanding of the mass media generally. This follows for two main reasons:

1. Firstly, we need to know who, in any society, is in a position to develop and exploit media technology (and to what ends).

2. Secondly, we need to know who selects and controls the information we receive through various media outlets.

In relation to this particular set of Notes, therefore, we are going to develop ideas relating to questions of ownership and control of the mass media in three main ways:

1. Firstly, leading-on from the outline of technological development, we need to consider the extent to which ownership (especially, but not exclusively, private ownership) allows powerful individuals and groups to exploit technological development. That is, to look at the use of the mass media not simply as a "profit-making" enterprise but also in terms of its potential use as a means of propagating various political, economic and ideological views.

2. Secondly, we need to develop the concept of media structure in order to understand the way in which power over the exploitation of technology is concentrated and centralized in (mainly) private and public hands on our society. In the course of this we will also have to consider the extent to which media forms:

   a. Respond to - or create - "public demand".
   b. Expand or limit an audiences' "freedom of choice".

3. Thirdly, we need to examine the difference between concepts of ownership of the media and control over (or management of) the day-to-day application of technology. We can use this idea to examine the process of news production in our society - the way in which "news" is selected, processed and created on a daily basis - and the relationship between ownership, control and ideology.

We will also explore the relationship between the media and advertising since, in any society where ownership of the media is mainly in private hands, we need to understand the relationship between media ownership, advertising and audience. We can start the analysis of the significance of ownership and control of the media by looking at "who owns what" in the British media. In the previous Study Pack, we touched on the question of media ownership, (albeit in 1982. Specific patterns of ownership have changed in the following 10 years, although the basic patterns of ownership have stayed much the same), and we can build on this to look at various patterns of ownership, the extent of the media holdings of various individuals and companies (the concept of economic concentration) and, most importantly, the relationship between various companies and their ownership of related areas of the mass media (the concept of economic conglomeration).

As I noted above, precise ownership of the mass media in Britain tends, like most areas of economic ownership, to be a fluctuating affair (newspapers are bought and sold, companies go bankrupt, merge and are taken-over. In the case of Independent Television companies in Britain, "broadcasting franchises" are regulated by the government and are "bought and sold" every fifteen years. This applies to what is known as "terrestrial broadcasting" - that is, broadcasts that originate and are transmitted from stations within the United Kingdom - but not to satellite broadcasting that originates outside of the government's political jurisdiction).

Whilst individual company media holdings are important (especially in ideological terms, as we will explore in greater detail in a moment), the most significant fact, for our current purposes, is that whilst the mass media in Britain is relatively huge and diverse in terms of the range of television, radio, newspaper and magazine publications offered to the general public (for example, a choice of 10 or so daily newspapers and a similar number of Sunday newspapers), actual ownership is not particularly diverse. This is significant, in general terms, for two main reasons:

Firstly, a relatively small number of individuals / companies are responsible for the production of a huge range of diverse publications (including television and radio).

Secondly, while the ownership of the media in Britain tends to be concentrated in the hands of a small number of companies, it's important to recognize the diversified nature of their actual media holdings. Media companies do not restrict their activities to a single area (such as newspaper production) but, on the contrary, they tend to have an "ownership presence" across a wide range of different media.

In some countries (such as the United States of America) media ownership is restricted and regulated by government in such a way that individuals / companies are not permitted to own television companies unless they are American citizens (hence Rupert Murdoch's decision to relinquish his Australian citizenship in favour of American citizenship).

> In parts of Europe, on the other hand, individuals / companies are not allowed a "cross-media presence" (that is, they cannot own both newspapers and television companies, for example).

In Britain we have a situation in which, as I've just noted, a few large companies combine to offer an apparently wide diversity of choice, both across different media (newspapers, television, etc.) and within different media (newspapers, for example). This concentration of ownership allied to a diversity of choice is not, however, unique to the media. If you go into a supermarket to buy washing powder you will find a huge range of apparent choice - but if you look at the label on each packet you will discover that each different "brand name" is actually owned by a relatively small number of producers (mainly Proctor and Gamble and Lever Brothers).

As an exercise, look at the relationship between "brand names" and ownership the next time you go shopping in a supermarket.

There is, of course, a major difference between selling washing powder and selling newspapers - the fact that the latter deals with news and / or information. In this respect, your choice of newspaper may affect the way in which you are encouraged to see the nature of the social world - in a way that your choice of soap powder does not. This is an idea that we will need to explore in more detail at a later point.
In the above, I've made reference to two ideas in relation to ownership of the mass media, namely economic concentration and conglomeration and, since these are very significant ideas we need to briefly explore them in a bit more detail...

Concentration and Conglomeration.

As Capitalism has developed over the past 200 - 300 years, two major economic tendencies are apparent.

1. Firstly, companies have become larger in size (through market expansion, take-over and merger and the like) and, consequently, have decreased in number (in the sense that various markets come to be dominated by a small number of very large companies. The technical term for this is oligarchy - a situation in which two - or usually more - very large companies co-exist within a particular market. Competition between them does occur, but it is normally on a scale that does not seriously damage an individual company's ability to make profits).

A good (non-media) example of an oligarchy is the major High Street banks in Britain. Lloyd's, National Westminster, Barclays and Midland all compete for customers within the marketplace, but this competition is not designed to put each other out of business (a "major bank" going bankrupt would have disastrous business consequences for the remaining banks). The four banks compete, but still manage to produce healthy profits for their shareholders...

This situation is similar to a monopoly (a situation in which only one company exists within a market), but it does, of course, have significant differences for the consumer / audience. The significance of oligopolies will be a bit clearer when we consider the idea of conglomeration.

Whilst the actual products offered to the consumer through the media may have grown more diverse, this "wide variety of products" is increasingly offered by either the same company or a very small number of companies. As Curran and Seaton ("Power without Responsibility: The Press and Broadcasting in Britain", 1981) note:

"...half the commercial television programmes that are transmitted, over two-thirds of paperback and record sales, over three-quarters of women's magazine circulation and over nine-tenths of national daily and Sunday paper circulation are controlled by the five leading companies in each sector.".

In the above respect we are not so much concerned with an examination of the diversity of products ("commodities") offered through the mass media in Britain as with an examination of the diversity of views on offer. That is, simply because the media offer their audience a diversity of products may not be the same as saying that they offer a wide range of different viewpoints.

 Explain, in your own words, the difference between a "diversity of products" and a "diversity of views" in relation to the mass media.

For example, although you may have the freedom of choice to buy one of ten different daily newspapers, if we were to find that each offers much the same sort of specific or general (political) point of view then effectively, your actual freedom of choice is severely restricted. Whether or not this is actually the case is something that we will need to explore in more detail, since it represents a very important distinction.

We can look at the extent to which a tendency towards concentration of economic ownership might serve to restrict the range of views and interpretations of events presented to an audience by large media organizations in relation to three areas:

a. The relationship between the mass media, ideology and culture in Britain.
b. The process of news production and selection.
c. The ideological representations of class, gender, age and ethnicity within the mass media.

A fourth area - that of "media effects" (the extent to which the mass media influence our perception of the social world in terms of politics and economics) will be discussed separately - mainly because it is a rather large area to cover and can be more usefully and easily considered in this way.

Secondly, as companies become larger in one area they have increasingly tended to diversify their interests into other, usually related, areas of the media (the process of conglomeration).

A good example of this process is that of News International, the multi-media corporation headed by Rupert Murdoch (the major shareholder). When Murdoch set-up the Sky satellite television network to broadcast to the United Kingdom, his initial problem was that he had to sell to potential viewers the dishes required to receive Sky.

In so doing, he had to offer these potential viewers something they could not get from terrestrial broadcasters and, in this instance, "first run" film channels became the key to attracting an audience. Murdoch offered potential viewers the chance to see modern films months before they became available to rent on video and years before they were likely to be broadcast on terrestrial channels.

However, Murdoch had a further problem to overcome, insofar as the major film studios (in America) had established a distribution system for the sale of their films. In order to protect their cinema market, film studios would not release films for video rental for at least six months after a film's initial cinema release. In addition, they sold "film packages" to terrestrial television companies after about two years following a film's initial release (longer if the film was such a massive success that it had a relatively long "video-rental" life). If a television company wanted to buy a "blockbuster" film they had to agree to buy it as part of a package that involved other, less commercially successful, films (which partly explains why so many rotten films turn-up on television).

Murdoch resolved this problem (that is, how to break the film studios' oligopoly) by buying a film studio (20th Century Fox) and using it to supply Sky with "first run" films plus a back catalogue of classic films. Having successfully broken this oligopoly (and effectively forcing film studios to sell "first run" films to satellite stations if they wanted to compete in this new market), Murdoch was also able to use the newspapers he owned (such as The Sun and the News of the World) to provide "free" advertising for his satellite station. This advertising took the form of "paid" adverts (where one arm of News International bought advertising space from another arm of the same company) and, more usefully, publicity in Murdoch papers through competitions, special offers and "feature articles" masquerading as "news"...

In the above we can see how a conglomerate such as News International was able to exploit its cross-ownership in various media to launch a new medium in a way that was:

> a. Necessary to the survival of Sky television.
> b. Not open to its competitors - a rival satellite station (British Satellite Broadcasting) found itself unable to compete and was quickly taken-over...

An interesting footnote to this situation is the fact that Murdoch's major supplier of satellite dishes was Amstrad, owned by Alan Sugar. Sugar provided the cash for a buy-out of Tottenham Hotspur Football Club and became their chairman (even though, as he admitted at the time, he did not support Tottenham and, indeed, was not particularly interested in football at all). As Chairman, Sugar was in a position (fortuitously or not as the case may be) to use his vote as a Club Chairman to agree to a deal between Sky and the Football Association that enabled the former to buy exclusive rights to televised football in Britain. All "live" Premier League football became available only to subscribers to one of Sky's sports' channels, which increased the sale of satellite dishes and subscriptions to Sky television.

Explain the difference between the concepts of "concentration" and "conglomeration".

To understand the significance of both media ownership and the process of concentration and conglomeration within the media, we need to explore the significance of the mass media in both cultural and ideological terms (and also the way in which the concepts of culture and ideology are related through the mass media). Thus, whenever you buy a newspaper or a magazine, switch on the television or radio, rent a film, go to the cinema, read a book or whatever, you are not only buying a commodity that can be used for some purpose (entertainment, education, information or whatever) you are also "buying into" a set of ideas that have been produced by someone.

That is, you are buying a view of the social world as it is seen by the people who, for example, select news for newspapers, television and radio, commission novels for printing, programmes for broadcasting or whatever.

Whilst we will consider the various ways in which people experience these "world views" in their daily lives in another Study Pack ("Media Effects"), we need to understand the significance of the idea that the media is not simply involved in the selling of a product; it is actively involved in the selling of various "world views" (or ideologies) and we need to explore the significance of this idea in relation to ownership, ideology and the culture(s) of our society...

The Mass Media, Culture and Ideology.

In this section we will be looking specifically at the area of the syllabus given-over to a consideration of the relationship between the mass media, ideology and culture. More specifically, I want to do a couple of things here:

1. Firstly, to outline the concepts of mass media, culture and ideology (with the focus mainly being on the latter).

2. Secondly, to relate the idea of ideology to ownership and control in various ways.

To begin with, therefore, we can note some definitions of the above concepts:

1. **Mass Media**.

David **Barrat** ("Media Sociology") offers the following, fairly straightforward, definition of "mass media" when he notes that:

"The mass media is a convenient shorthand term usually used to describe all those forms of communication that reach large audiences. It includes film, television, radio, newspapers…"

He further notes:

"Sociological research into the mass media has been uneven. Certain forms have received a good deal of attention while others have been relatively neglected. In particular, television and the press have been studied much more thoroughly than other forms of mass communication.".

2. **Ideology**.

This is an idea that we will develop at some length, mainly because:

a. It is a key sociological concept. If you can grasp the basic ideas involved in relation to the concept of ideology it will prove very useful to you in the understanding of all aspects of the A-Level course.

b. The mass media transmits ideas to an audience and we need to understand both the content of these ideas (since it would be useful to know exactly what information is being transmitted to an audience) and the possible effect that exposure to such ideas is likely to have. In this respect, questions of ownership and control come into significant play here and we will need to develop these two concepts (ownership and ideology) as they relate to one another in our society.

Since ideology is such a key sociological concept, it's not surprising that we have a fairly wide range of definitions available to us. To begin with, therefore, consider the following definitions I've chosen to illustrate this concept.

1. "An ideology is a pattern of ideas, both factual and evaluative [that is, related to the values we all hold about the nature of the social world as we see it], which claims to explain and legitimise the social structure and culture of a particular group in society and which seems to justify social actions which are in accordance with that pattern of ideas.".
Penny Henderson ("A-Level Sociology").

2. "An ideology is essentially an integrated framework of categories, concepts, and relevancies [things our society considers to be important] grounded in a particular mode of existence [in simple terms, a way of life]. This framework is a largely unconscious construction which structures perception and thought, systematically excluding certain realities and promoting and shaping others. At the same time as filtering reality, ideological structures permit events to be 'mapped', i.e. located within wider contexts and related to similar events. In short, ideologies are structures through which the subjective reality of things is fashioned and meaning imposed on the social world".
Steve Chibnall ("Law-and-Order News")

3. "A set of beliefs about the social world. These beliefs may be distorted and not based on actual facts. Often these beliefs are used to justify the position of powerful people in society, for example the power of men over women (sexism), white over black (racism), and so on...The beliefs and values comprising these ideologies form a set, that is to say, they are interconnected. Ideologies are determined by the economic arrangements of society, hence many believe the owners of the means of production influence or control the ideas of society. Ideologies are linked to...knowledge. What passes for knowledge is socially determined".
Martin Joseph("Sociology For Everyone").

Using the above as a source, identify 3 or 4 "key features" of any ideology.

From the definitions that I've provided, it's possible to extract a number of what might be termed the essential features of an ideology. In short, we can note a number of central characteristics that will provide us with a working definition of ideology.

1. An ideology is a framework of ideas:
> That is, an ideology serves to somehow provide a structure for our observations about the social world. In so doing, it serves to provide a pattern (or framework) for those ideas, such that we can see a relationship between them.

2. Ideas are socially produced:
> In this respect, we can see the idea that social phenomena are not "self-evident things". That is, the idea that what we observe has to be explained by relating our observations to some form of theory (or framework). Essentially, we can see the argument that ideas are no-more than beliefs about the nature of the social world. The purpose of ideology, therefore, is to provide a map by which we can chart the relationship between ideas and, hopefully, explain the nature of the world.

3. Beliefs may be (empirically) true or false:
> This idea develops the one noted above - that no observations about the social world are inherently true or false. In this respect, an ideology represents a collection of subjective beliefs that are arranged in some vaguely coherent form in order to allow us to go about our daily business in the belief that the social world has a reasonable, more-or-less structured, reality.

4. Ideologies are partial:

> That is, an ideology represents only one way - amongst many - of looking at and interpreting the social world. We also see, in this respect, the idea that ideologies serve the purpose of not only allowing us to make sense of the world - they can also be used to justify such things as sexual, racial and economic discrimination.

We can start to develop some of the above ideas, in relation to the mass media, by doing two things:

> a. Understanding the process whereby ideologies are related to beliefs (that is, the nature of the relationship between belief and ideology).

> b. The significance of the concept of power in relation to ideology (which, as you will no-doubt recall, is a "dual theme" I have repeatedly stressed throughout various sets of Notes).

We can start to understand the first of these ideas (the process whereby ideologies are related to beliefs) by looking at both the way in which ideologies develop and also at their significance to us as both individuals and as members of a wider society. It's important to understand that the following is a very schematic outline of the above process - it's designed simply to give you a basic understanding of the way in which such a process develops. In this respect, you should read the following in this light rather than simply assume that it is a "hard-and-fast" description (a set of rules about the way in which ideologies necessarily develop), since, as you will be aware, life is rarely as simple and straightforward as we might like to believe for the purpose of studying it...

1. We can start by noting that the basic "building blocks" of any ideology are "beliefs" - where a "belief" is an acceptance that something is true, with or without proof. A couple of examples here might be:

> A belief in God (God's existence has not been "proven").
> A belief that you are taught in a classroom (we could probably prove this to most people's satisfaction).

2. Beliefs are not isolated from one another and nor are they simply random ideas about the world. On the contrary, beliefs are connected to one other, such that a belief in one thing will presuppose a belief in something else. We can illustrate this idea in the following way:

> A Christian belief in God might also involve:
> Believing the 10 Commandments:
> Trying to live your life in their light:
> "Thou Shalt Not Kill" - may lead to:
> Belief that war is wrong
> Pacifism
> Belief that Capital Punishment is wrong
> Anti-Hanging

Again, this is just a very simple example of a possible process of interconnection - it shouldn't be taken to mean that "all Christians are pacifists".

3. Beliefs, as we have noted, may be empirically true or false. For example, I may believe such things as the idea that:

> The world is flat,
> Women are superior to men,
> You are studying Sociology...

In individual terms (and also in a wider social context), it is not particularly important (ideologically) whether or not something is actually true or false, since:

a. If you believe something to be true then,
b. You will behave as if it is true.

Thus, if you believe that the world is flat then you're unlikely to book a world cruise (unless you have a death wish).

If you believe that women are superior to men, this will be reflected in your everyday interaction with members of the opposite sex (if you are female, for example, you will choose to act in ways that reflect your feelings of superiority. If you are male, on the other hand, you will have to act in ways that acknowledge your belief in female superiority).

4. As we have noted earlier, an ideology represents a set of related beliefs about the world (a framework or structure of beliefs). For example, within Sociology we can identify various perspectives:
> Functionalism,
> Conflict Theories,
> Interactionism,

and these are all ideologies - different ways of looking at and interpreting the social world. This follows because such perspectives represent a framework of related beliefs about both the nature of the social world and how we should, as Sociologists, interpret that world. In this respect, ideologies:

a. Provide a framework for our beliefs,
b. Provide a structure to our ideas,
> that enables us to:
>> a. Interpret our observations,
>> b. Relate one idea to another in a "coherent" fashion.

In basic terms therefore, ideologies represent:

a. A pattern of ideas about the nature of the world.
b. A set of related beliefs about that world.

The Place of Ideology in the Social World.

As I have suggested, social phenomena are not "self-evident things": that is, they do not have an independent existence from the people who produce them. In this sense, anything that happens in the social world consists of forms of behaviour that have to be actively interpreted if we are to "make sense" of them. An example of this "interpretation process" might help to make this idea a bit clearer:

Imagine that you observe two people walking hand-in-hand down the street.
What possible interpretations of this behaviour can you identify?

There are, of course, a large number of possible interpretations of this behaviour, a few of which might be that the two people are:
Lovers,
Parent and child,
Friends,
Someone leading a blind person...
Given these possible interpretations, how do we, as individuals, interpret or "make sense" of the behaviour we have witnessed? How, in short, do we explain to ourselves "what is going-on in this situation"?

What we do, in effect, is try to use an ideological framework against which we can check our observations. In this sense, we can talk about using an ideological map to chart these observations and locate them within a social context.

The features of our ideological map consist of various concepts - ideas that we use to help us locate observed behave in its social context and, by so doing, help us to explain what we see. Thus, in this instance, in order to understand the behaviour of these two people we might use concepts such as:

   Age - How old are the couple?
   Gender - Will it make a difference if they are both female / male and female etc?
   Disability - Are they both able-bodied?

By using such basic, general, concepts, we can effectively begin to:

a. Suggest possible interpretations that fit our ideological framework.
b. Eliminate possible interpretations that do not fit our ideological framework.

Thus, if we observe that:

They are each 25 - 30 years old,
   One is male and the other male female and
   They are both physically able,

we come up with the possibility that they might be either lovers or friends. Having established roughly what we believe their behaviour to represent we can then refine our interpretation - in the sense that we again refer to our ideological framework of knowledge about how we know "lovers" behave, for example.

If we see the couple kissing each other, therefore, we can probably safely assume that the behaviour we have observed is that of two lovers.

We can, of course, rarely be certain that our interpretation of this behaviour is 100% correct, for a variety of reasons - but the important point to note here is the process of interpretation. In order to understand people's behaviour we use an ideological framework that allows us to "map" the characteristics of that behaviour against known situations. This ability is very important to us in our lives (since it enables us to recognize social situations and adopt appropriate behaviour for that situation). It allows us to store (remember) the basic defining characteristics of various social situations on a long-term basis.

However, whilst we develop ideologies because they are useful to us, it is also evident that if you are able to influence the type of ideological framework that people develop in order to interpret their social surroundings, then this will make you very powerful, mainly because you will be influencing the way people think without them being aware of that influence...

Thus, although in a psychological sense, ideologies are basically individual sets of beliefs (my beliefs may be different to yours, for example), it's clear that in order for people to involve themselves in various forms of social interaction on a long-term, routine, basis, people in various societies evolve very generalized ideologies - ideological beliefs that large numbers of people have in common. An example here might be support for a particular political party:

In Britain, a number of distinctive political ideologies exist:

> Socialist,
> Conservative,
> Liberal,
> Fascist,
> Communist.

In a sense, the ideologies noted above are "ready made" - they already exist in society as a framework of ideas and, as such, people "move into" and "out of" them ideologically in a way that mirrors movement into and out of various social groups, for example. In addition, it is evident that people are frequently exposed to competing ideological perspectives (such as in the above instance) and it's possible that they may:

> Discard aspects of an ideology,
> Confuse different aspects of an ideology.

From the above example of politics we can see that people develop organized sets of ideological beliefs - but it is evident that some ideologies have greater currency than others (that is, some are believed by more people than others). In our society for example, there are more Conservative voters than Communist voters. This is where the concept of power comes into the equation. Power, you may recall, has been loosely defined by Giddens ("Sociology") as

"The ability of individuals / groups to make their own interests count, even where others resist",

and it should be evident that if we have the power, in mass media terms, to:

> a. Select / highlight information,
> b. Interpret this information,
> c. Present it to a mass audience,

we have a greater chance of,

> a. Getting our ideas across to that audience and
> b. Convincing a mass audience that our ideas are correct.

Although the concept of power can be used to show why some ideologies reach a mass audience whilst others do not, we also need to understand why some ideologies are believed and others discarded (that is, although we may be successful in projecting an ideology onto a mass audience, it doesn't simply follow that this audience will accept the messages we are trying to get across to them. In the above example, even where Labour politicians have much the same opportunity as Conservative politicians to get their message across to a mass audience, for the past 16 years it is the Conservatives who have succeeded in influencing most people through the ballot box...).

If we think back to the process involved in the interpretation of the behaviour of the two people holding hands, this idea can be elaborated thus:

1. Ideas arise within society (and the role of the mass media may be significant in the production and projection of such ideas).

2. In order to understand / interpret such ideas, we seek to reference our ideological framework of beliefs.

3. We attempt to locate these ideas within that ideological framework and thereby explain what we see.

On this basis, our beliefs about the world are grounded in our experiences of and in that world ("experiences" that include not just our personal experience but also the experience that we receive "second-hand" through the mass media). In short, when we are exposed to new ideas, we try to assimilate / understand them in terms of our current beliefs and to achieve this we try and match these ideas to our experiences. Thus, ideas that somehow seem to fit in with our experiences (in sociological terms they are consonant with our beliefs - the academic term being cognitive assonance) will have a greater chance of being incorporated into our beliefs.

Ideas that do not fit (in sociological terms they are dissonant - the academic term being cognitive dissonance) will, accordingly, stand a high chance of being rejected. Thus, in order to get an ideological message across to an audience in a way that will be incorporated into the ideological beliefs of that audience, we must:

1. Ensure that our ideas have an ideological reference point within the collective beliefs of the audience.

2. Ensure that the experiences of the audience "match-up" with the ideas that we are projecting.

In short, if we want our ideas to be believed, we have to transmit them in such a fashion as to ensure that they can be easily and plausibly incorporated into the ideological framework of the audience.

Furthermore, as I've suggested, in some circumstances (especially where we have little "first-hand" experience of something that happens in our society), the mass media are an important source of cultural / ideological transmission. This follows because they:

a. Are able to project ideas widely across society (to a mass audience).

b. Are in a position to select particular information for that audience to consume.
In this respect, it appears evident that the mass media must be responsible for the propagation of particular ideologies (since they will be transmitting information that is, by definition, fundamentally ideological).

The question of how effective they are in getting people to believe the ideological message they propagate, however, is something we will need to consider in detail in the "Media Effects" Notes.

The relationship between the mass media, ideology and culture is a complex one and, as with the above, this complexity can only be superficially handled in this context. However, let's consider this relationship in terms of what we have, thus far, discovered.

1. Firstly, the mass media has the technological capability of projecting particular ideological interpretations of the social world onto a mass audience.

2. As a source of ideas (and, perhaps, many other things), the mass media is an agency of secondary socialization. In this respect it competes with - and also complements - other agencies of socialization. However, the mass media has a feature that is not shared, to any great extent, by other agencies in our society - namely, the ability to gather information from a wide geographic area and from a wide range of sources and to present this information to the individual in a way that is beyond the capacity of any individual to replicate.

That is, there is so much information swilling around in our society that no one individual (or group come to that) can experience it all personally. This places each of us in a highly dependent position in relation to the owners and controllers of the mass media, since it will probably be our main (possibly our only) source of information about what is happening across our society as a whole (rather than simply the parts of that society of which we have some degree of personal experience).

This is not, of course, to say that we necessarily believe everything we read, hear or see in the media, but it does establish the very important - and highly significant - concept of dependence. This dependence puts those who are able to own and control the media in a potentially powerful position...

3. People are, as we know, socialized into the culture of the society in which they live. In turn, however, they pass-on their cultural socialization to others (cultural transmission). The way we think and act in our lives becomes a part of the culture of our society - in effect, our behaviour contributes to the general process of cultural production and reproduction (even though we probably don't think about our behaviour in these terms). In this respect, we are looking at a two-way process; people behave in ways that create cultural values and norms and, in turn, these cultural values and norms affect the way we behave.

To use C. Wright Mills' (The Sociological Imagination") classic concept, once we recognize these ideas we become aware of the "sense of the trap" that is society - something we actively create whilst, at the same time being a prisoner of our creation.

Having looked at some general aspects of culture and ideology in these Notes, it will be necessary in the following Notes to develop these ideas in a bit more detail. In addition, we will also look at the way in which we can link them into the general sociological debate about the significance of the concepts of ownership and control in relation to the mass media.