


AS Sociology

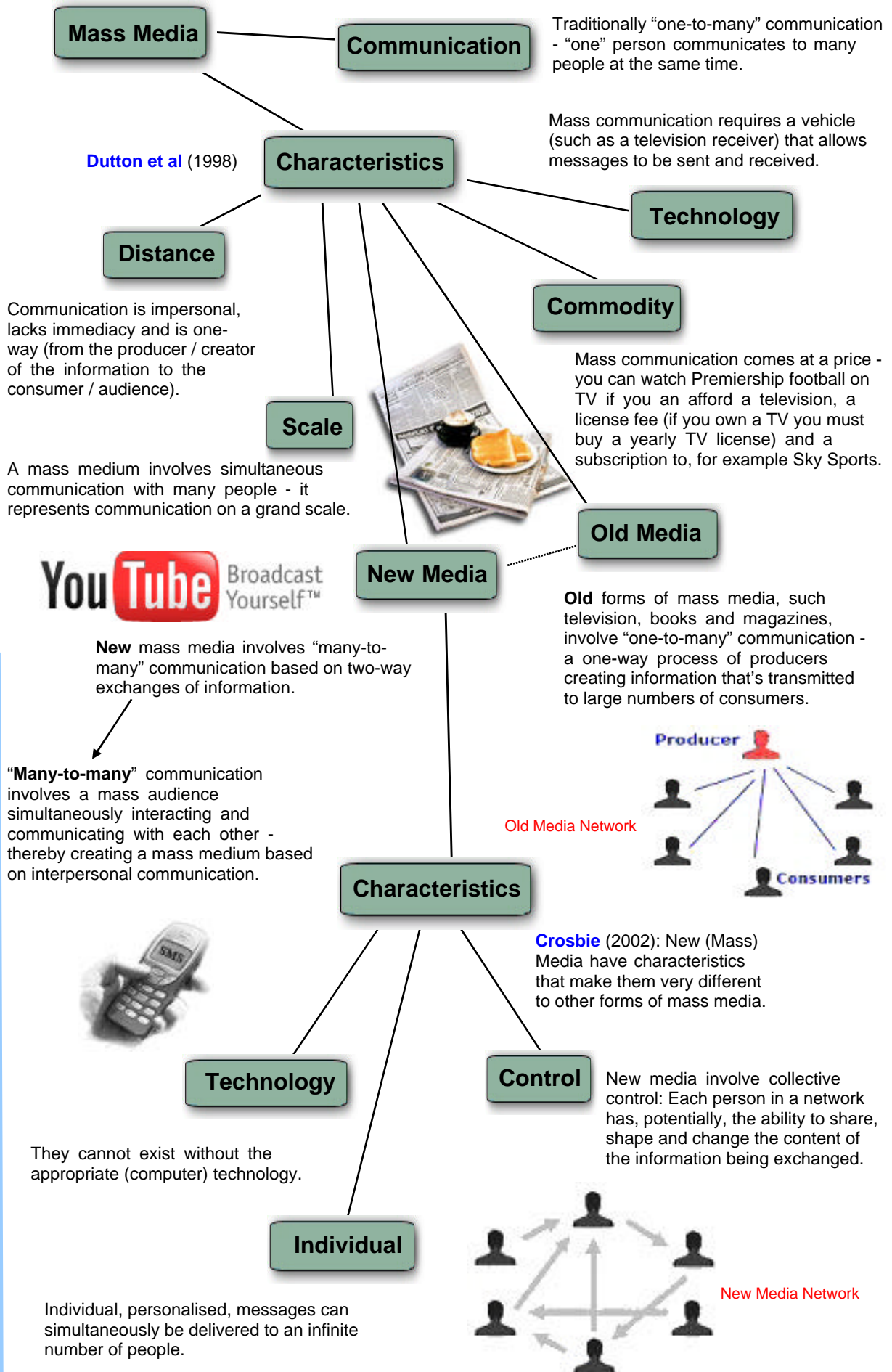
Revision
Mapping

Mass Media

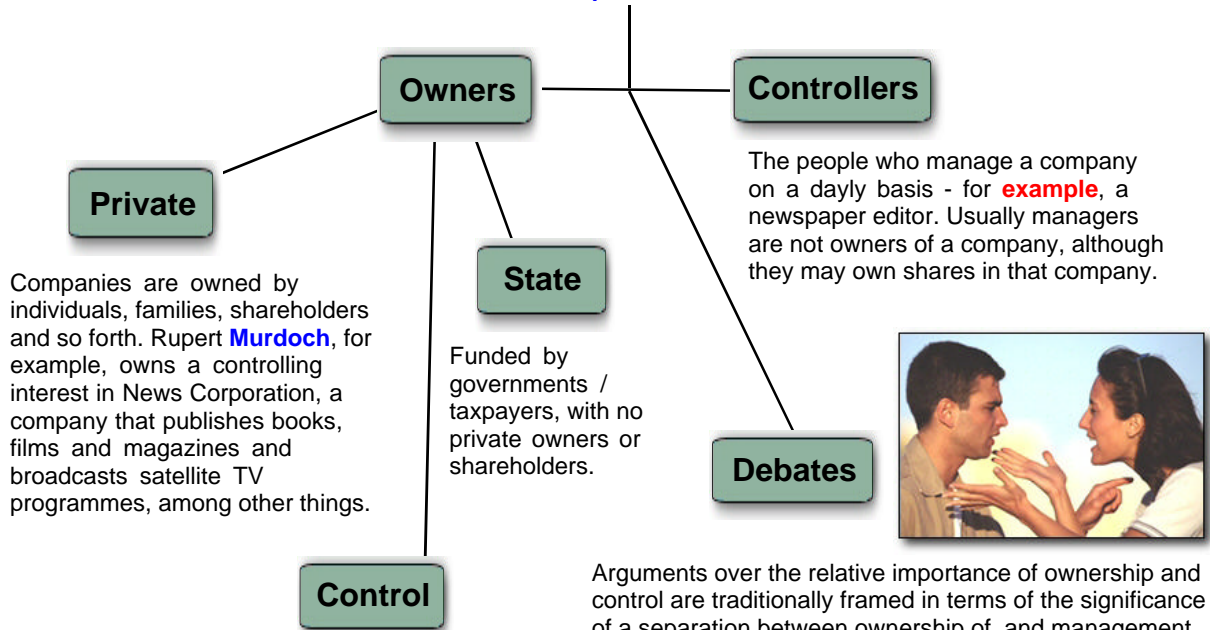


“Different explanations of the relationship between ownership and control of the mass media”.

© Chris. Livesey 2006: www.sociology.org.uk



Ownership and Control

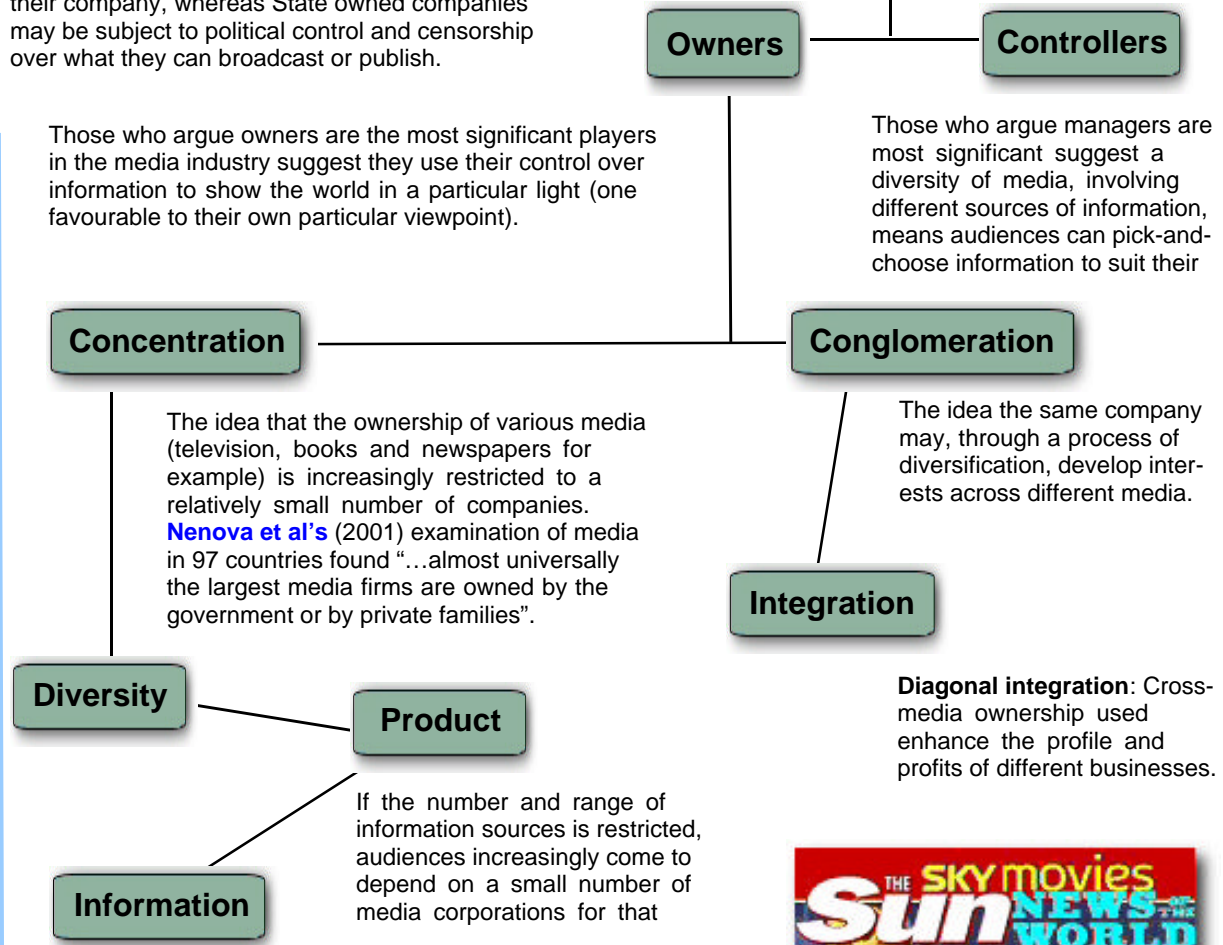


Owners can decide what sort of information an audience will receive. For **example**, private owners may decide not to publish a book critical of their company, whereas State owned companies may be subject to political control and censorship over what they can broadcast or publish.

Arguments over the relative importance of ownership and control are traditionally framed in terms of the significance of a separation between ownership of, and management roles within, media companies to prevent, in **Mobbs'** (2002) phrase "Undue influence over, or bias in, content".

Those who argue owners are the most significant players in the media industry suggest they use their control over information to show the world in a particular light (one favourable to their own particular viewpoint).

Those who argue managers are most significant suggest a diversity of media, involving different sources of information, means audiences can pick-and-choose information to suit their



The idea that the ownership of various media (television, books and newspapers for example) is increasingly restricted to a relatively small number of companies. **Nenova et al's** (2001) examination of media in 97 countries found "...almost universally the largest media firms are owned by the government or by private families".

The idea the same company may, through a process of diversification, develop interests across different media.

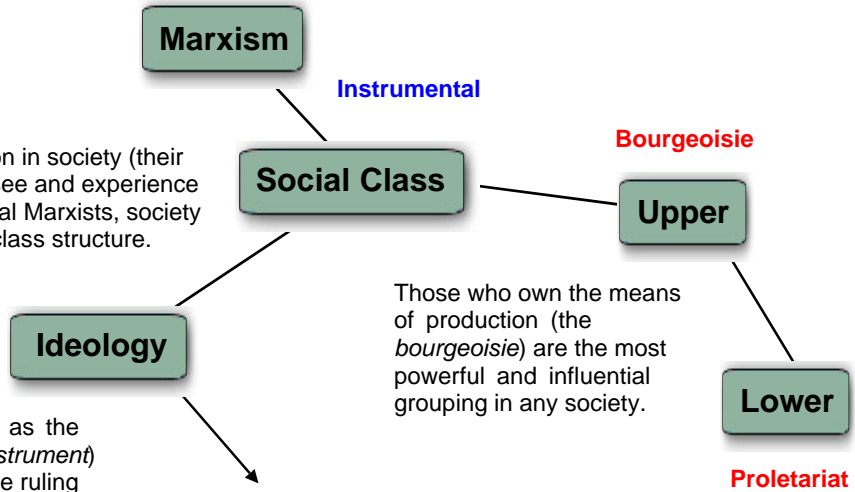
If the number and range of information sources is restricted, audiences increasingly come to depend on a small number of media corporations for that

Diagonal integration: Cross-media ownership used enhance the profile and profits of different businesses.

McChesney (2000) argues we have the "appearance of choice" in various media - lots of different products all selling much the same sort of (limited range) of ideas. **Compaine** (2000) argues the global trend is not for an increased concentration of media companies.

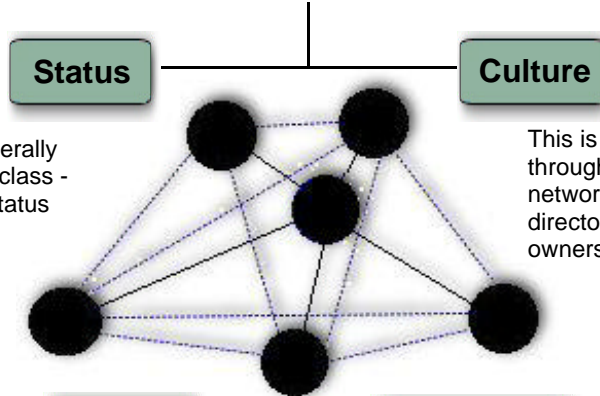


An individual's economic position in society (their class) influences the way they see and experience the social world. For Instrumental Marxists, society is seen in terms of a particular class structure.



Ideological institutions, such as the media, are used as a tool (or *instrument*) to spread ideas favourable to the ruling class (bourgeoisie) throughout society.

Milliband (1973): Ruling class has a common:



Owners and controllers -generally drawn from the same social class - have a common economic status that sets them apart.

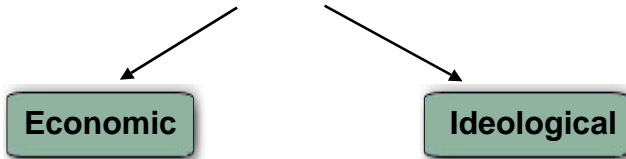
This is created and reinforced through education, family networks, inter-locking directorships, media ownership and so forth.

Have ultimate control over a company - they decide, for example, who to employ to run their businesses.



Only "control" a business in the sense they oversee its operation. The editor of a newspaper may control things like the stories appearing each day, the hiring and firing of employees and so forth. The owner, however, ultimately controls the political stance of the paper, the type of audience it aims to reach and the like.

Ownership and control is part of the same process, with two, interconnected, objectives:



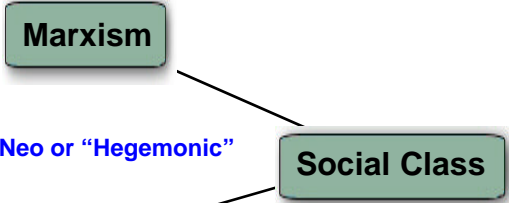
One objective is usually to make profits.

This aspect is significant because it's designed to create the conditions under which profit is not only created - and kept in private hands - but is seen as legitimate. One objective, common to both owners and controllers, is to protect and enhance the interests of a Capitalist ruling class and this is achieved through the media.

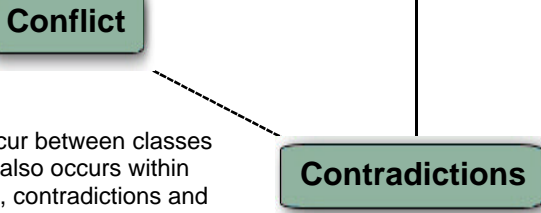


The media is an **instrument**) through which ideas, beliefs and behaviours are manipulated. Ownership and control is used to create a picture of the social world beneficial to the interests of the most-powerful people in society.

False consciousness: By their ability to control and limit the information people receive, a ruling class is able to control how people *think* - both directly and indirectly - about the things happening in society.

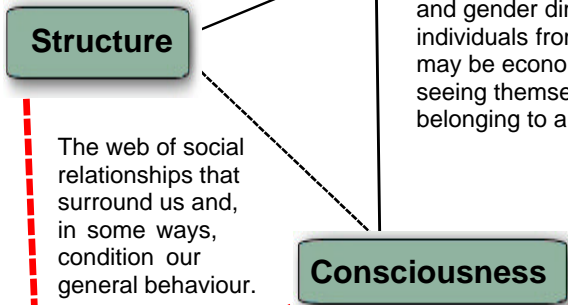
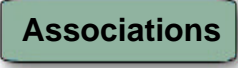


Class is not a static (unchanging) classification system; rather, as writers such as E.O. Wright (1985) argue, it's a dynamic system of shifting and changing social relationships.



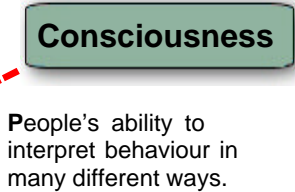
Conflict doesn't just occur between classes in Capitalist society - it also occurs within classes. Thus divisions, contradictions and conflicts of interest occur within a dominant (or ruling) class. Within the bourgeoisie in our society, for example, there are clear conflicts between Manufacturing capital and Finance capital (just as some parts of the ruling class are "pro-Europe" while others are "anti-Europe").

Professionals and intellectuals (part of the upper middle classes) have significant roles in the class structure. They occupy, according to Poulantzas (1975) "contradictory class positions" - neither wholly bourgeois nor wholly proletarian. This, for Neo-Marxists, is a significant idea in any explanation of the relationship between media owners and controllers.

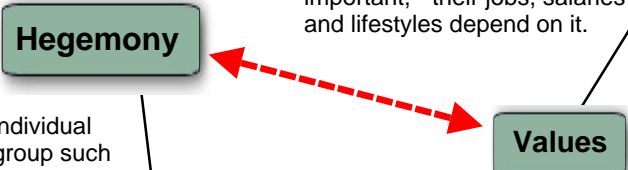


The web of social relationships that surround us and, in some ways, condition our general behaviour.

Class associations can involve ethnic and gender dimensions (for example, individuals from some ethnic groups may be economically successful while seeing themselves, culturally, as not belonging to a middle or upper class)



People's ability to interpret behaviour in many different ways.



It's impossible for any individual (let alone a very large group such as a ruling class) to directly control how people think and behave (the "conspiracy aspect" of traditional Marxism). The concept of *hegemony* is used to show how both owners and controllers are locked-into a (structural) relationship that is mutually beneficial.

Also see profitability as important, - their jobs, salaries and lifestyles depend on it.

Have to make profits - this is their guiding principle (since if businesses are unprofitable they may cease to exist).

Owners and controllers have a basic common interest that binds them together in terms of their **core values** (shared beliefs). Marginal disagreements may occur over things like the most efficient way to make profits, but not over the basic principle of the need for profitability.



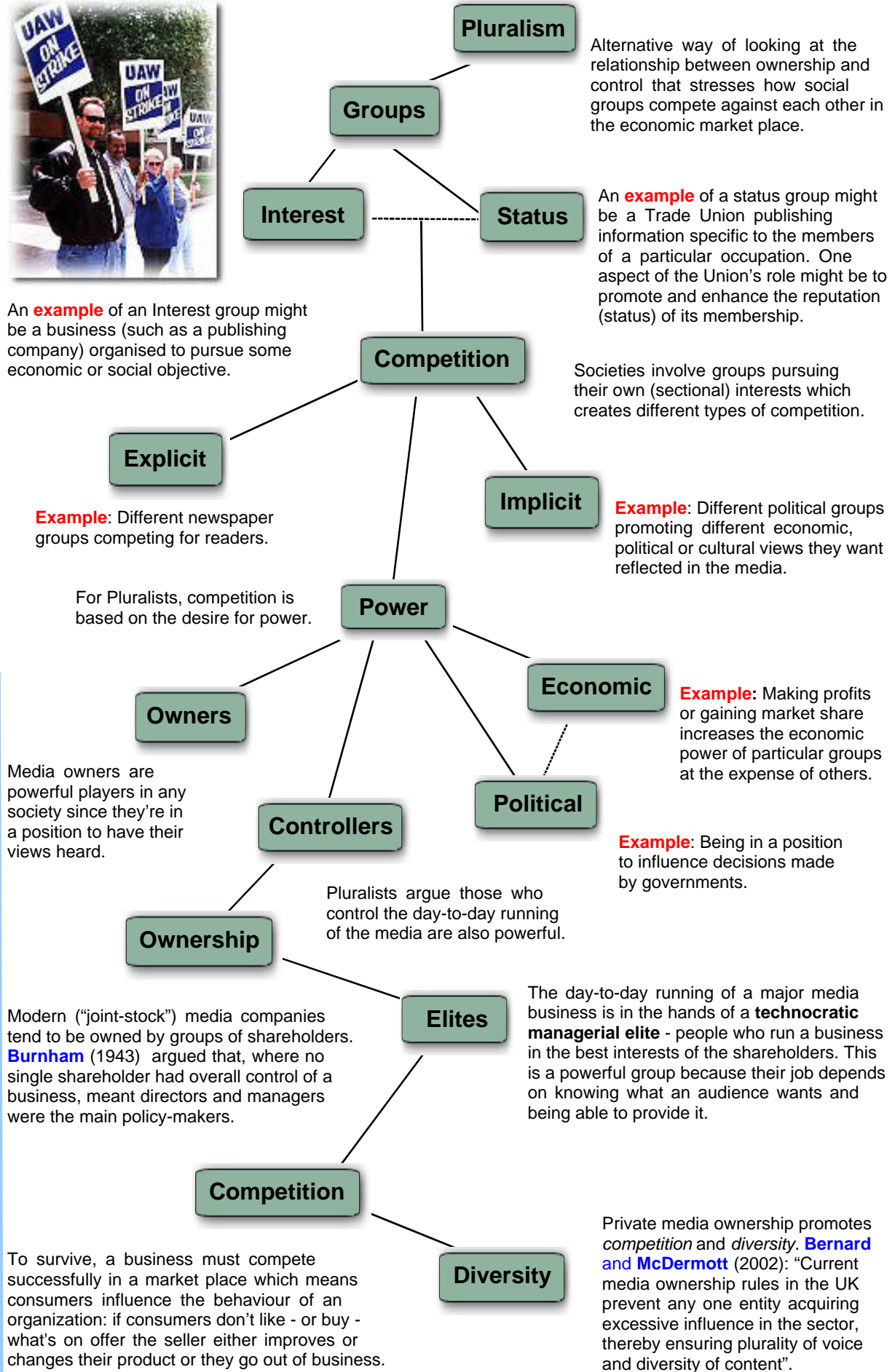
Managers have a certain level of freedom to make decisions. Owners employ managers who can be trusted to:

Reflect their views and

Make profits.



An **example** of an Interest group might be a business (such as a publishing company) organised to pursue some economic or social objective.



Alternative way of looking at the relationship between ownership and control that stresses how social groups compete against each other in the economic market place.

An **example** of a status group might be a Trade Union publishing information specific to the members of a particular occupation. One aspect of the Union's role might be to promote and enhance the reputation (status) of its membership.

Societies involve groups pursuing their own (sectional) interests which creates different types of competition.

Example: Different newspaper groups competing for readers.

Example: Different political groups promoting different economic, political or cultural views they want reflected in the media.

For Pluralists, competition is based on the desire for power.

Media owners are powerful players in any society since they're in a position to have their views heard.

Example: Making profits or gaining market share increases the economic power of particular groups at the expense of others.

Example: Being in a position to influence decisions made by governments.

Pluralists argue those who control the day-to-day running of the media are also powerful.

Modern ("joint-stock") media companies tend to be owned by groups of shareholders. **Burnham** (1943) argued that, where no single shareholder had overall control of a business, meant directors and managers were the main policy-makers.

The day-to-day running of a major media business is in the hands of a **technocratic managerial elite** - people who run a business in the best interests of the shareholders. This is a powerful group because their job depends on knowing what an audience wants and being able to provide it.

To survive, a business must compete successfully in a market place which means consumers influence the behaviour of an organization: if consumers don't like - or buy - what's on offer the seller either improves or changes their product or they go out of business.

Private media ownership promotes *competition* and *diversity*. **Bernard and McDermott** (2002): "Current media ownership rules in the UK prevent any one entity acquiring excessive influence in the sector, thereby ensuring plurality of voice and diversity of content".

2 marks

Explain what is meant by the 'concentration of ownership' of the mass media.

**Exam Questions****8 marks**

Identify and briefly explain two criticisms of the Marxist view that the mass media simply serve capitalism.

Item

According to the pluralist view, the media simply respond to demand, providing what their viewers, listeners and readers want. If the media have any influence over people, it is because they reflect and reinforce society's basic values, not because they impose their ideas on the public. In fact, any attempt to do this would be likely to fail: the audience would simply tune to another channel or buy a rival newspaper closer to their own views. Any publisher or broadcaster who persisted in producing unpopular output would risk going out of business.

Today's society is composed of a great diversity of groups, none of which is able to dominate society or the media. Pluralists argue that the media reflect this diversity in their output, catering for many tastes and giving the public a wide range of choice. In recent years, technological advances such as the internet and digital broadcasting have increased the choices available.

20 marks

Using material from the Item and elsewhere, assess the pluralist view of the mass media.

© Chris. Livesey 2006