

Power Without Responsibility

In their 1997 book, *Power Without Responsibility*, James Curran and Jean Seaton explored the huge power yielded by owners of the large press groups such as Rupert Murdoch's News International (right). The book has been updated a number of times, and is considered very important in understanding the relationship between who owns the mass media and their output. They also discuss public service broadcasting, and who it is really answerable to. The latest edition looks at web ownership and controls, and considers who will control the future of new media.

Some of their key ideas are as follows:

- The mass media is driven and influenced by political agendas that are difficult to separate from other economic influences, but it often dovetails with them. These are perhaps the most obvious when we look at newspaper reportage, and the relationships between media conglomerates and politicians. However, it is also evident in television news and in competition for broadcasting licences as well as infiltrating many other areas, including the influence of politics on themes and subject matter of documentaries and fictional media texts.
- Technological change in the newspaper industry in production methods, where processes are increasingly digitised, has reduced the power of journalists, with stories that displease editors or owners easily pulled and replaced at short notice.
- The era of technological optimism heralded by New Labour in 1997 was still afflicted by the same attitudes to deregulation of the media, and the process was accelerated. The removal of controls over ownership is an issue because it can lead to concentration of ownership and domination of the market by a few big media organisations.
- The new media market has tended to feature many of the same big brands that dominated old media, which still account for some of the most visited websites. Globalisation has simply allowed big companies to become bigger and more powerful. Web 2.0 is complicated by the takeover of some initially independently owned companies, with audiences and consumers often unaware that sites and services they use and perhaps believe to be 'independent' are in fact owned by the same few companies.

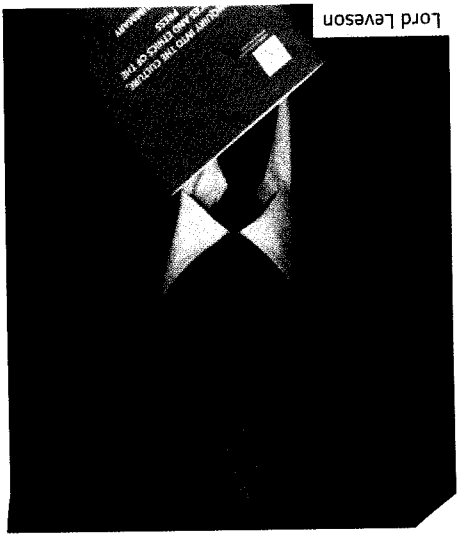
- The rise of new media is thought to be associated with a decline in quality across the mass media, which affects every sector, including public service broadcasting.
- Curran and Seaton view the web as a place where dissenting voices can still be heard, but also a place where big businesses can operate in a less visible way, since most politicians are more focused on national political and business affairs. The seventh edition of *Power Without Responsibility* considers the web to still be a contested space. Big business could yet be counter-balanced by the strength of web users united in particular activities and with more socially responsible attitudes to the potential of the web.

EXAMPLE: The Leveson Inquiry

During the phone hacking scandal, high-profile employees of tabloid newspaper and News International were summoned to appear at the Leveson Inquiry in 2011. The outcome of the inquiry was that huge criticisms were made of the way in which some newspapers disregarded journalistic ethics and it led to the withdrawal of the Press Complaints Commission and its replacement by the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) in an attempt to more powerfully regulate the industry's activities.

Curran and Seaton's ideas feature as 'enabling ideas' in your Media Studies specification. Look through a copy of the book, *Power Without Responsibility*, and collect between three and five paragraphs from different sections that interest you. You can copy these for academic purposes. If done as a group activity, choosing different paragraphs and discussing these will help you to link many more ideas.

Annotate the paragraphs with notes or questions, and highlight key phrases. Then prepare a summary in your own words of each. Can you use any of them to add to the list opposite?



Lord Leveson