

Table 13.4 Livingstone and Lunt: ten minute revision

Concept 1: citizen and consumer based models of media regulation

- Citizen-oriented regulation is concerned with content-based issues.
- Citizen-based regulation is a positive form of regulation that directs media content so that it can improve the lives of citizens and contribute to the well-being of wider society.
- Citizen-based regulation promotes forms of media that are able to hold powerful groups to account.
- Consumer-based regulation seeks to ensure that the media landscape contains a variety of different producers so that audiences have choice.
- Consumer-based regulation seeks to ensure that the technological infrastructure that provides media to the public is fit for purpose.
- Consumer-based regulation creates an environment in which audiences themselves make judgements about the kinds of media that are appropriate for their consumption.
- A consumer-oriented approach has dominated the media landscape as a result of the Communications Act 2003 and the creation of Ofcom.

Concept 2: the challenge of regulation in the age of globalised media

- Globalisation has reduced the power of national governments to control the media – global companies operate beyond the scope and boundaries of any one country.

Two theorists who might challenge Livingstone and Lunt

- **Henry Jenkins:** would emphasise the benefits that the global digital media landscape offers. He would argue that digital media allows audiences to freely construct their own products and to make connections with like-minded individuals across the world. This process has also enabled some groups to affect deep-seated social change.
- **David Gauntlett:** again, would emphasise the benefits of globalisation. Globalisation, he might argue, has brought audiences into contact with a wide range of identities that they did not previously have access to. This has helped audiences to perceive their identities as fluid and not fixed.

14 The culture industry

David Hesmondhalgh

Hesmondhalgh's 'cultural industries' approach explores the media from the perspective of commercial production practices and makes two enormously important observations regarding the necessities of product development:

1 **Products exist as a result of their economic context.** Hesmondhalgh, first and foremost, tells us that media products are made within a commercial context. Much like any other business product, media content is manufactured to create profit, or, in the case of public service broadcasting, to maintain audience engagement. To gain a full understanding of the media industry and its impacts, Hesmondhalgh argues, we must appreciate the extent to which media-making decisions are guided by the needs of commerce as opposed to creativity.

2 **The media industry is a high risk business.** 'All business is risky,' Hesmondhalgh writes, 'but the cultural industries constitute a particularly risky business' (Hesmondhalgh, 2015, 27). The impossibility of predicting audience tastes coupled with the high costs of production and the effects of mass competition mean that the business of making commercially successful media is very difficult. The reduction of those risks, Hesmondhalgh argues, has compelled the media industry to be structured in highly specific ways with risk minimisation, moreover, playing a crucial role in directing the design and marketing of media content.

Concept 1: maximising profits and minimising risks

The high stakes nature of the media industry is exemplified, perhaps, by the enormous problems that film production companies face when trying to distribute a new release. *Forbes* magazine estimates that of the 700 plus films released in cinemas during 2018, over 80 per cent lost money. Similarly, the British Film Institute's analysis of the 760 films released in the UK in 2017 identifies that the top 50 grossing releases took 81 per cent of box office takings, while the bottom 660 films shared just 7 per cent of audience receipts (BFI, 2018).

Such figures underline the 'winner takes all' nature of commercial media, in which a relatively small number of big hits capture a disproportionate share of the available profits. Predicting the success of those big hits, Hesmondhalgh tells us, is hugely difficult if not impossible. Hesmondhalgh (2015) outlines these difficulties as follows:

- **Media businesses are reliant upon changing audience consumption patterns.** Audience tastes continuously adapt making it incredibly difficult to produce material that guarantees satisfaction.
- **The media industry is reliant on marketing and publicity functions.** Products need the oxygen of publicity if they are to thrive, but controlling the messages delivered by reviewers or publicity partners of other companies is very difficult – even if such organisations are owned by the same parent company as the producer.
- **Media products have limited consumption capacity.** Unlike other businesses, films, television and music-based products tend to be consumed as 'one off' purchases. The 'one off' nature of production means that the huge sums of cash invested to create media products results in a one-time reward.

Hesmondhalgh argues that the risks associated with media creation leads the culture industry to employ a highly tuned range of production and organisational practices. Moreover, because the media industry is sustained, by and large, using the enormous profits achieved from the industry's winners – top grossing films, hit TV dramas and so on – it has to employ an economic model that deliberately overproduces media content.

In short, media companies create as many products as they can in the hope that one or two projects will be hits. By definition, only large-scale companies can successfully engage in this overproduction model given the enormous sums required to finance multiple projects simultaneously and the requisite need to absorb the huge losses of failed products while companies search for big hits.

The ways in which media organisations expand

Hesmondhalgh argues that overproduction has compelled media production companies to expand through mergers or the acquisition of smaller companies. Growth in the media sector has traditionally centred on the following three strategies:

- 1 **Horizontal integration:** acquiring media companies that operate in similar sectors enables large-scale institutions to achieve scale-based cost savings, while also allowing them to maximise profits by positioning brands so they do not compete with one another. (The benefits of horizontal integration are covered in more detail in Chapter 12.)
- 2 **Vertical integration:** by acquiring production, distribution and marketing specialist subsidiaries, media conglomerates can control all aspects of their supply chain while also achieving significant cost-saving efficiencies. (Again, a more detailed discussion of the benefits wrought through vertical integration are covered in Chapter 12.)
- 3 **Multi-sector integration:** buying companies across the culture industry allows for further cross-promotion opportunities and the deployment of brands across media platforms. Most films, for instance, create cross-brand profits through the sale of soundtracks and, in the case of Disney, through their theme park experiences.

Expansion strategies and brand acquisitions

Hesmondhalgh, like Curran and Seaton, is careful to distinguish between those personnel in the media industry who are responsible for producing creative content – the 'symbol creators' as Hesmondhalgh calls them – and those who oversee the wider business-oriented functions of media distribution.

Traditionally, Hesmondhalgh tells us, 'symbol creators are granted considerable autonomy within the process of production – far more, in

Box 14.1 Discuss it: what impact does internationalisation have on media?

Hesmondhalgh suggests that media expansion is often pursued so that producers can develop the ability to distribute their products on a global scale (internationalisation). Global distribution, of course, generates the capacity to exponentially increase the profits made from any single investment, but can also result in media products that sacrifice local favour in order to maximise global appeal.

- In what ways are today's mainstream media products crafted so that they can appeal to international audiences?
- Does today's globalised media landscape mean that we consume a disproportionate number of products that originated in the US? Is this problematic?
- Do audiences suffer when their media stops being local?

fact, than most workers in other forms of industry' (Hesmondhalgh, 2015, 32). Writers and directors, journalists and designers, he tells us, are given enough artistic freedom to create products that excite audience engagement. Yet, Hesmondhalgh argues, these loose controls are giving way to tighter business models in which creativity increasingly plays a secondary role to marketing needs and brand development.

This process is evidenced, in part, by the kinds of acquisitions that have dominated media expansion in the past decade. Yes, conglomerates continue to expand both vertically and horizontally, but they are growing in ways that also enable them to acquire lucrative brand-driven content. Disney's \$71 billion takeover of Fox in March 2019, for instance, was pursued, in part, to give Disney exclusive access to the hugely successful film and television brands cultivated by 21st Century Fox. And, as a consequence of that acquisition, the task of Disney's creative team in the coming years is not to produce new content, but to maximise the storytelling opportunities that are presented through Disney's ownership of the *X-Men* franchise, *The Simpsons*, *Deadpool* and *Kingsman*.

'The increasing presence and status of marketing,' Hesmondhalgh argues, 'represents a shift in the relations between creativity and commerce' (Hesmondhalgh, 2015, 243). Product-branding decisions, for instance, are increasingly channelled by audience research and focus

groups. Product content, too, is pushed in directions that audience data suggests will generate the most sales, while consumption of products using digital platforms has enabled media makers to mine audience data in new and extraordinary ways. Netflix, for example, understands in microscopic detail the consumption patterns of its subscribers, gathering data about what audiences are watching, for how long and for how many episodes. This advanced data harvesting informs Netflix's decisions about what it will commission or indeed who it will commission to make future programming.

Product formatting and risk reduction

Media makers, Hesmondhalgh also tells us, control commercial risks through the careful supervision of distribution and promotion practices, effecting what he calls 'artificial scarcity' – restricting access to products by limiting their availability to platforms that are owned by the parent company of the product (Hesmondhalgh, 2015, 31). Disney, for example, restricts access to its film back catalogue to its vertically integrated distribution services (principally its cable broadcasting infrastructure and Disney+ streaming service). This allows Disney to preserve the mystique of its classic films while also preventing competing broadcasters from using Disney content as a means to grow their own audiences.

Hesmondhalgh, too, draws our attention to the following formatting strategies used by the media industry:

- **Star formatting.** It takes, Hesmondhalgh suggests, 'considerable marketing efforts, in order to break a writer or performer as a new star' (Hesmondhalgh, 2015, 31). Yet star power, once enabled, can deliver ready-made audiences for products.
- **Genre-based formatting.** Labelling media content using genre-based categories allows audiences to identify the potential rewards of consuming a particular media product in advance of consumption. In this sense, genres, Hesmondhalgh argues, operate in the same way that brands pre-promise consumer satisfaction.
- **Serialisation.** The use of sequels and prequels are well-established techniques that are deployed to maximise audience engagement and to allow producers to maximise their investments in serialised material (spin-offs, sequels, etc.). Serialised media needs less investment in marketing activities to create audience visibility. Prequels,

Box 14.2 Apply it: how do film marketing products use established formatting techniques to reduce risk?

Hesmondhalgh's approach can be applied to questions that ask you to consider how products are styled or formatted in order to create audience interest. Use the following questions to help you construct Hesmondhalgh-oriented analysis:

- **Star power:** In what ways does the product use star power? For what is the star best known and for what sorts of audience will the star create appeal? Remember that stars can include writers, directors and journalists as well as performance-oriented stars.
- **Genre-based formatting:** What genre does the product invoke through marketing decisions? How is the product stylised to make its genre explicitly visible? What narrative satisfactions does genre formatting convey to the product's target audience?
- **Remakes and serialisation:** Does the product piggyback on previously successful products? How does it invoke product nostalgia to recapture existing audience interest? In what ways is the product reshaped for a new audience?
- **Independent styling:** Does the product deliberately invoke a non-mainstream aesthetic? For whom does this create appeal?

Exemplar: *Black Panther* (Edugas). Hesmondhalgh's assertion that media creativity is subservient to the business and marketing function of the industry is readily visible in *Black Panther*. The movie's use of a predominantly black cast initially looked like a high risk strategy in terms of delivering a mainstream audience, yet the use of the Kendrick Lamar soundtrack and the selection of Michael B. Jordan (*Creed*) as a frontline presence helped secure recognisable star power. The further choice of Martin Freeman (*The Hobbit* and *The Office*) as Everett K. Ross also helped deliver wider European and UK audience appeal. Interestingly, Freeman is the first character we see in the UK general release trailer. Hesmondhalgh would similarly draw attention to the heavy presence of Marvel Studio branding within the trailer and the reputation of the hugely successful and in vogue Superhero formula as a means of reducing the commercial risk through product serialisation.

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too, piggyback on pre-existing audience successes, while also enabling institutions to nurture star power through the introduction of new talent within an established, and relatively risk free, formula.

- **Remakes.** The media industry further reduces risk by recycling archived material that has enjoyed prior success. Retellings often seek to recapture audience engagement through nostalgia-based appeals, while also rebranding content so that it fits the needs of a contemporary audience.
- **Independent labelling.** Hesmondhalgh points, too, to the use of 'independents' to produce and market media goods. Independents, he argues, provide a useful means of engaging audiences that are reluctant to consume mainstream media. Conglomerates also delegate production to independents to shield themselves from the impact of content failure on their brand identity. Companies that are truly independent, of course, use their non-mainstream status as a marketing tool, deliberately styling and formatting their products in ways that make them look and feel alternative.

Concept 2: the effects of the internet revolution are difficult to diagnose

A great deal of academic writing that has tried to diagnose the impact of technological innovation has, Hesmondhalgh argues, done so using overly simplistic formulas. The reality of the digital revolution, he suggests – if it can be described as a revolution at all – is highly complex. More importantly, Hesmondhalgh tells us, the various practices that are seen to constitute 'Web 2.0' represent, in reality, a continuation of the activities of traditional mass media provision.

The faux benefits of cyberspace

Hesmondhalgh suggests that the often cited positive effects of the digital revolution stem from an overly romanticised view of technology as an anti-authoritarian counterweight to traditional power sources. In contrast, he argues that the internet's 'many minor forms of subversion, insubordination and skepticism don't cancel out the enormous concentrations of power in the cultural industries' and further diagnoses those subversive effects as 'representing a disturbance' (Hesmondhalgh, 2015, 361). Hesmondhalgh's relegation of the digital

revolution to the status of a mere 'disturbance' centres on a critique of the following two claims regarding technological innovation:

- 1 That the digital revolution gives power to audiences by enabling cultural participation and that audience control is enabled through feedback mechanisms.
- 2 That the digital revolution has weakened the power of the mass media.

In many ways, the benefits outlined above are very similar to the 'participatory culture' and 'end of audience' arguments presented, respectively, by Henry Jenkins (Chapter 18) and Clay Shirky (Chapter 19). Hesmondhalgh offers the following three criticisms:

- 1 **The web gives unequal user access and depends on user skill levels.** When we refer to the internet, we are really describing its capacity to provide a host of benefits, including email functionality, social networking, data storage, entertainment provision, etc. Hesmondhalgh argues that users mostly access internet services in a relatively simplistic manner and usually for information retrieval purposes only – reading online news, browsing the weather and so on. Only a relatively small number of advanced users deploy, or have the skills to deploy, the 'participatory culture' skills that Shirky and Jenkins celebrate.
- 2 **The internet is dominated by a relatively small number of providers.** Hesmondhalgh points to the dominance of search engines and their ability to point users to a small number of sources. In this sense, the near monopoly of Google as the world's search engine flatly contradicts the notion that the internet has eroded media concentration.
- 3 **The internet is increasingly dominated by commercialised activity.** Hesmondhalgh argues that the democratising impact of the internet has been further damaged by the adoption of an internet model that relies on advertising revenue. 'Much web content,' Hesmondhalgh argues, 'is permeated by advertising to the extent that it is sometimes difficult to tell where the advertisements end and the content begins' (Hesmondhalgh, 2015, 331). Thus, the neutrality of the information provided by the internet is compromised by commercial imperatives.

Hesmondhalgh, too, suggests that the various forms of technological advances of the digital era are often packaged together in ways that suggest the digital revolution is a singular force. In reality, he argues, technological advances have had varied effects on media forms. Hesmondhalgh identifies the following sector specific trends:

- **Digital games.** Despite technological advances, the games sector is still dominated by an oligarch of hardware companies (Sony, Nintendo and Microsoft). Smaller independent production has grown, but those companies are largely responsible for software development (with the exception of Electronic Arts). As a result, Hesmondhalgh suggests, the digital revolution has not really had an effect on the games sector – larger companies are still able to forge cross-media synergies with the film and music sectors, while formatted franchises (*Call of Duty*, *Assassin's Creed*, etc.) are used to maximise audiences and reduce risk.
- **Newspaper industry.** Hesmondhalgh suggests that technological developments have had a significantly adverse impact in this sector. Online media has eroded readerships and forced newspapers to adopt free-to-view online models. Some titles have tried to mitigate the effects of plummeting advertising revenues by implementing pay-per-view firewalls (The *Times*), while other publications such as *The Guardian* have turned to supplementary activities – using their brand recognition to sell dating services, books, holidays, music and other add-ons.
- **Television.** Hesmondhalgh points to the hybridisation of television and the internet to produce on-demand services and to enable time-shifted consumption patterns; however, he also argues that television viewing figures have not reduced greatly. The winners of the analogue to digital broadcast migration, he argues, are more likely to be the small number of global organisations that own the archives of content needed to fill on-demand services. Disney's new global streaming service, Disney+, is a case in point here. Hesmondhalgh, too, points to the continued use of celebrity power to attract audiences to streamed television products, with remakes and serialised content dominating the schedules of on-demand television services.

Box 14.3 Discuss it: what is the real impact of the so-called 'digital revolution'?

- Do you think that modern audiences fluently engage in participatory culture?
- Is participatory culture more likely to be used by a limited number of social groups? Think here in terms of age, gender and class.
- Which groups are likely to be excluded from the benefits of participatory culture?
- Are audiences still passive consumers?

Box 14.4 Apply it: assessing the revolutionary impact of digital innovation on your set texts

Hesmondhalgh's diagnosis of the digital revolution as a 'disturbance' can be integrated in exam responses that ask you to consider the way that digital consumption has impacted on audiences. Discussion that centres around the following three criticisms could be applied to these questions:

- 1 Digital products continue to engage passive viewing responses.
- 2 Digital products tend to be made by a relatively small number of providers.
- 3 The commercialisation of the web weakens the suggestion that the web is a democratising medium.

Exemplar: *Minecraft* (OCR). Jenkins (see Chapter 18) would revel in the way that *Minecraft* audiences have harnessed digital communications technology to effect digital fan power and moreover, in the capacity of those fan groups to engage in 'transmedia learning'. Yet, Hesmondhalgh reminds us, we have to be careful not to over-endorse the impact of digital technologies. The *Minecraft* experience might produce some connected fan activity, yet for every skilled player who is uploading content to the *Minecraft Realm* there are a far greater number of less skilled users who effect traditionally passive engagements. Moreover, the acquisition of *Minecraft* by Microsoft points to the continued presence and power of mass media conglomerates in the gaming industry. *Minecraft* might appear to evidence the democratising effects of the media, but it also provides ample evidence of the way that digital technologies have been co-opted by traditional media practices.

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Table 14.1 Speak David Hesmondhalgh

Creative business managers	Those workers who look after the marketing, distribution and financing of media products.
Creative symbol makers	Hesmondhalgh suggests that those workers who create media products (scriptwriters, directors, etc.) are the media's creative symbol makers. Traditionally, creatives were given lots of freedom in the media industry, but, Hesmondhalgh argues, creative decision making is increasingly sidelined in favour of a business-oriented approach.
Genre formatting	Promoting products using genre formatting helps audiences to understand the narrative satisfactions that a product can offer prior to consumption.
Internationalisation	Internationalisation refers to strategies adopted by media makers to maximise their profits and audience reach using global distribution.
Serialisation	Serialisation enables producers to reduce risk by constructing products that have an established audience.
Star formatting	The foregrounding of star power (writers, actors, directors and journalists) in products and promotional material to generate audience interest.

Table 14.2 Hesmondhalgh: ten minute revision

Concept 1: maximising profits and minimising risks

- The media industry is prone to risk as a result of shifting audience tastes.
- The media industry tries to reduce risk through overproduction.
- Overproduction strategies, generally speaking, can only be engaged by large media conglomerates.
- Media conglomerates have expanded to enable them to cope with risk.
- Media products are carefully formatted using a number of industry specific strategies to reduce risk.

Concept 2: the effects of the internet revolution are difficult to diagnose

- The democratising effects of the digital revolution have been over-exaggerated by some academics.
- Digital media is used by audiences in radically different ways, while only a few users have the necessary skills to engage in participatory culture.
- The internet is dominated by a handful of very powerful companies.
- The commercialisation of the web has further reduced its democratising capacity.

Two theorists who might challenge Hesmondhalgh's thinking

- **Henry Jenkins:** emphasises the positive effects of the digital revolution – suggesting that digital media cultivates online communities and allows audiences to express themselves in positive and creative ways through fan engagement.
- **Clay Shirky:** might argue that large-scale media providers will be replaced by producers that are created by everyday users, or that mass media content will be significantly controlled by audience feedback mechanisms.

15 Media modelling effects

Albert Bandura

The exploration of aggression had been a point of interest for psychologists and philosophers long before Bandura introduced the world to his Bobo doll experiments. Sigmund Freud, for example, explained the origins of aggression as an innate and instinctive emotional response. Excessive masculine aggression, he reasoned, was present as a result of the male sex drive, suggesting that male aggression is driven by a latent fear of castration by our fathers.

Post-war psychologists, too, looked inwards to explain the presence of aggression – some connecting outwardly violent behaviour to the genetic disposition of individuals or to hormonal imbalances. Even as late as 1965, the psychologist P.A. Jacobs argued that a disproportionate number of institutionalised men, those committed to prison or mental institutions, were born with an extra chromosome that produced hyper-masculine behaviours. Aggression, Jacobs reasoned, was genetic or the product of innate dispositions that were beyond the control of the individual.

Bandura's experiments, however, led him to a remarkably different set of conclusions and gave birth to a psychological school of thought that was later labelled 'social learning theory'. Bandura's research, in short, suggested that our behaviours are not governed by innate traits or genetic impulses but that our environments – the human environment in particular – shapes the way we behave.

Concept 1: violent behaviours are learned through modelling

Bandura's psychological experiments led him to conclude that behaviours are acquired as a result of the following two processes: